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THE MADONNA OF THE FUTURE.

AND OTHER TALES.



THE
MADONNA OF THE FUTURE
AND OTHER TALES.

BY
HENRY JAMES, JR.

IN TWO VOLUMES.
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NOTE.

THREE of the accompanying Tales—the first, third, and fourth in order—were included in a collection of short stories published in Boston some years since. Two of the others—the second and the last—are now reprinted for the first time from American periodicals. All these things have been revised and retouched. “The Diary of a Man of Fifty” originally appeared in *Macmillan's Magazine*.

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THE MADONNA OF THE FUTURE,

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THE MADONNA OF THE FUTURE.

WE had been talking about the masters who had achieved but a single masterpiece—the artists and poets who but once in their lives had known the divine afflatus and touched the high level of perfection. Our host had been showing us a charming little cabinet picture by a painter whose name we had never heard, and who, after this single spasmodic bid for fame, had apparently relapsed into obscurity and mediocrity. There was some discussion as to the frequency of this phenomenon; during which, I observed, H—— sat silent, finishing his cigar with a

meditative air, and looking at the picture, which was being handed round the table. "I don't know how common a case it is," he said at last, "but I have seen it. I have known a poor fellow who painted his one masterpiece, and"—he added with a smile—"he didn't even paint that. He made his bid for fame and missed it." We all knew H—— for a clever man who had seen much of men and manners, and had a great stock of reminiscences. Some one immediately questioned him further, and while I was engrossed with the raptures of my neighbour over the little picture, he was induced to tell his tale. If I were to doubt whether it would bear repeating, I should only have to remember how that charming woman, our hostess, who had left the table, ventured back in rustling rose-colour, to pronounce our lingering a want of gallantry, and, finding us a listening circle, sank into her chair in spite of our cigars, and heard the story out so graciously that when the catastrophe was reached she glanced across at me and showed me a tear in each of her beautiful eyes.

It relates to my youth, and to Italy: two fine things! (H—— began.) I had arrived late in the

evening at Florence, and while I finished my bottle of wine at supper, had fancied that, tired traveller though I was, I might pay the city a finer compliment than by going vulgarly to bed. A narrow passage wandered darkly away out of the little square before my hotel, and looked as if it bored into the heart of Florence. I followed it, and at the end of ten minutes emerged upon a great piazza, filled only with the mild autumn moonlight. Opposite rose the Palazzo Vecchio, like some huge civic fortress, with the great bell-tower springing from its embattled verge as a mountain-pine from the edge of a cliff. At its base, in its projected shadow, gleamed certain dim sculptures which I wonderingly approached. One of the images, on the left of the palace door, was a magnificent colossus, shining through the dusky air like a sentinel who has taken the alarm. In a moment I recognised him as Michael Angelo's *David*. I turned with a certain relief from his sinister strength to a slender figure in bronze, stationed beneath the high, light loggia which opposes the free and elegant span of its arches to the dead masonry of the palace ; a figure supremely shapely and graceful ; gentle, almost, in spite of his holding out with his

light, nervous arm the snaky head of the slaughtered Gorgon. His name is Perseus, and you may read his story, not in the Greek mythology, but in the memoirs of Benvenuto Cellini. Glancing from one of these fine fellows to the other, I probably uttered some irrepressible commonplace of praise, for, as if provoked by my voice, a man rose from the steps of the loggia, where he had been sitting in the shadow, and addressed me in good English—a small, slim personage, clad in a sort of black velvet tunic (as it seemed), and with a mass of auburn hair, which gleamed in the moonlight, escaping from a little mediæval birretta. In a tone of the most insinuating deference, he asked me for my “impressions.” He seemed picturesque, fantastic, slightly unreal. Hovering there in this consecrated neighbourhood, he might have passed for the genius of æsthetic hospitality—if the genius of æsthetic hospitality were not commonly some shabby little custode, flourishing a calico pocket-handkerchief and openly resentful of the divided franc. This analogy was made none the less complete by the brilliant tirade with which he greeted my embarrassed silence.

“I have known Florence long, sir, but I have never

known her so lovely as to-night. It's as if the ghosts of her past were abroad in the empty streets. The present is sleeping; the past hovers about us like a dream made visible. Fancy the old Florentines strolling up in couples to pass judgment on the last performance of Michael, of Benvenuto! We should come in for a precious lesson if we might overhear what they say. The plainest burgher of them, in his cap and gown, had a taste in the matter! That was the prime of art, sir. The sun stood high in heaven, and his broad and equal blaze made the darkest places bright and the dullest eyes clear. We live in the evening of time! We grope in the gray dusk, carrying each our poor little taper of selfish and painful wisdom, holding it up to the great models and to the dim idea, and seeing nothing but overwhelming greatness and dimness. The days of illumination are gone! But do you know I fancy—I fancy"—and he grew suddenly almost familiar in this visionary fervour—"I fancy the light of that time rests upon us here for an hour! I have never seen the David so grand, the Perseus so fair! Even the inferior productions of John of Bologna and of Baccio Bandinelli seem to realise the artist's dream. I feel

as if the moonlit air were charged with the secrets of the masters, and as if, standing here in religious attention, we might—we might witness a revelation!" Perceiving at this moment, I suppose, my halting comprehension reflected in my puzzled face, this interesting rhapsodist paused and blushed. Then with a melancholy smile, "You think me a moonstruck charlatan, I suppose. It's not my habit to hang about the piazza and pounce upon innocent tourists. But to-night, I confess, I am under the charm. And then, somehow, I fancied you too were an artist!"

"I am not an artist, I am sorry to say, as you must understand the term. But pray make no apologies. I am also under the charm; your eloquent remarks have only deepened it."

"If you are not an artist you are worthy to be one!" he rejoined, with an expressive smile. "A young man who arrives at Florence late in the evening, and, instead of going prosaically to bed, or hanging over the travellers' book at his hotel, walks forth without loss of time to pay his devoirs to the beautiful, is a young man after my own heart!"

The mystery was suddenly solved; my friend was

an American! He must have been, to take the picturesque so prodigiously to heart. "None the less so, I trust," I answered, "if the young man is a sordid New-Yorker."

"New-Yorkers have been munificent patrons of art!" he answered, urbanely.

For a moment I was alarmed. Was this midnight reverie mere Yankee enterprise, and was he simply a desperate brother of the brush who had posted himself here to extort an "order" from a sauntering tourist? But I was not called to defend myself. A great brazen note broke suddenly from the far-off summit of the bell-tower above us, and sounded the first stroke of midnight. My companion started, apologised for detaining me, and prepared to retire. But he seemed to offer so lively a promise of further entertainment, that I was indisposed to part with him, and suggested that we should stroll homeward together. He cordially assented; so we turned out of the Piazza, passed down before the statued arcade of the Uffizi, and came out upon the Arno. What course we took I hardly remember, but we roamed slowly about for an hour, my companion delivering by snatches a sort of moon-touched æsthetic lecture. I

listened in puzzled fascination, and wondered who the deuce he was. He confessed with a melancholy but all-respectful head-shake to his American origin.

“We are the disinherited of Art!” he cried. “We are condemned to be superficial! We are excluded from the magic circle. The soil of American perception is a poor little barren, artificial deposit. Yes! we are wedded to imperfection. An American, to excel, has just ten times as much to learn as a European. We lack the deeper sense. We have neither taste, nor tact, nor power. How should we have them? Our crude and garish climate, our silent past, our deafening present, the constant pressure about us of unlovely circumstance, are as void of all that nourishes and prompts and inspires the artist, as my sad heart is void of bitterness in saying so! We poor aspirants must live in perpetual exile.”

“You seem fairly at home in exile,” I answered, “and Florence seems to me a very pretty Siberia. But do you know my own thought? Nothing is so idle as to talk about our want of a nutritive soil, of opportunity, of inspiration, and all the rest of it. The worthy part is to do something fine! There is no law in our glorious Constitution against that.

Invent, create, achieve! No matter if you have to study fifty times as much as one of these! What else are you an artist for? Be you our Moses," I added, laughing, and laying my hand on his shoulder, "and lead us out of the house of bondage!"

"Golden words—golden words, young man!" he cried, with a tender smile. "'Invent, create, achieve!' Yes, that's our business; I know it well. Don't take me, in Heaven's name, for one of your barren complainers—impotent cynics who have neither talent nor faith! I am at work!"—and he glanced about him and lowered his voice as if this were a quite peculiar secret—"I'm at work night and day. I have undertaken a *creation*! I am no Moses; I am only a poor patient artist; but it would be a fine thing if I were to cause some slender stream of beauty to flow in our thirsty land! Don't think me a monster of conceit," he went on, as he saw me smile at the avidity with which he adopted my illustration; "I confess that I am in one of those moods when great things seem possible! This is one of my nervous nights—I dream waking! When the south-wind blows over Florence at midnight, it seems to coax the soul from all the fair things

locked away in her churches and galleries ; it comes into my own little studio with the moonlight, and sets my heart beating too deeply for rest. You see I am always adding a thought to my conception ! This evening I felt that I couldn't sleep unless I had communed with the genius of Buonarrotti !”

He seemed deeply versed in local history and tradition, and he expatiated *con amore* on the charms of Florence. I gathered that he was an old resident, and that he had taken the lovely city into his heart. “I owe her everything,” he declared. “It's only since I came here that I have really lived, intellectually. One by one, all profane desires, all mere worldly aims, have dropped away from me, and left me nothing but my pencil, my little note-book” (and he tapped his breast-pocket), “and the worship of the pure masters—those who were pure because they were innocent, and those who were pure because they were strong !”

“And have you been very productive all this time ?” I asked sympathetically.

He was silent a while before replying. “Not in the vulgar sense !” he said at last. “I have chosen never to manifest myself by imperfection. The good

in every performance I have re-absorbed into the generative force of new creations; the bad—there is always plenty of that—I have religiously destroyed. I may say, with some satisfaction, that I have not added a mite to the rubbish of the world. As a proof of my conscientiousness”—and he stopped short, and eyed me with extraordinary candour, as if the proof were to be overwhelming—“I have never sold a picture! ‘At least no merchant traffics in my heart!’ Do you remember that divine line in Browning? My little studio has never been profaned by superficial, feverish, mercenary work. It’s a temple of labour, but of leisure! Art is long. If we work for ourselves, of course we must hurry. If we work for her, we must often pause. She can wait!”

This had brought us to my hotel door, somewhat to my relief, I confess, for I had begun to feel unequal to the society of a genius of this heroic strain. I left him, however, not without expressing a friendly hope that we should meet again. The next morning my curiosity had not abated; I was anxious to see him by common daylight. I counted upon meeting him in one of the many pictorial

haunts of Florence, and I was gratified without delay. I found him in the course of the morning in the Tribune of the Uffizi—that little treasure-chamber of world-famous things. He had turned his back on the Venus de' Medici, and with his arms resting on the railing which protects the pictures, and his head buried in his hands, he was lost in the contemplation of that superb triptych of Andrea Mantegna—a work which has neither the material splendour nor the commanding force of some of its neighbours, but which, glowing there with the loveliness of patient labour, suits possibly a more constant need of the soul. I looked at the picture for some time over his shoulder ; at last, with a heavy sigh, he turned away and our eyes met. As he recognised me a deep blush rose to his face ; he fancied, perhaps, that he had made a fool of himself overnight. But I offered him my hand with a friendliness which assured him I was not a scoffer. I knew him by his ardent *chevelure*; otherwise he was much altered. His midnight mood was over, and he looked as haggard as an actor by daylight. He was far older than I had supposed, and he had less bravery of costume and gesture. He seemed the quite poor, patient artist he

had proclaimed himself, and the fact that he had never sold a picture was more obvious than glorious. His velvet coat was threadbare, and his short slouched hat, of an antique pattern, revealed a rustiness which marked it an "original," and not one of the picturesque reproductions which brethren of his craft affect. His eye was mild and heavy, and his expression singularly gentle and acquiescent; the more so for a certain pallid leanness of visage, which I hardly knew whether to refer to the consuming fire of genius or to a meagre diet. A very little talk, however, cleared his brow and brought back his eloquence.

"And this is your first visit to these enchanted halls?" he cried. "Happy, thrice happy youth!" And taking me by the arm, he prepared to lead me to each of the pre-eminent works in turn and show me the cream of the gallery. But before we left the Mantegna, he pressed my arm and gave it a loving look. "*He* was not in a hurry," he murmured. "He knew nothing of 'raw Haste, half-sister to Delay!'" How sound a critic my friend was I am unable to say, but he was an extremely amusing one; overflowing with opinions, theories, and sympathies, with disqui-

sition and gossip and anecdote. He was a shade too sentimental for my own sympathies, and I fancied he was rather too fond of superfine discriminations and of discovering subtle intentions in shallow places. At moments, too, he plunged into the sea of metaphysics and floundered a while in waters too deep for intellectual security. But his abounding knowledge and happy judgment told a touching story of long, attentive hours in this worshipful company; there was a reproach to my wasteful saunterings in so devoted a culture of opportunity. "There are two moods," I remember his saying, "in which we may walk through galleries—the critical and the ideal. They seize us at their pleasure, and we can never tell which is to take its turn. The critical mood, oddly, is the genial one, the friendly, the condescending. It relishes the pretty trivialities of art, its vulgar cleverness, its conscious graces. It has a kindly greeting for anything which looks as if, according to his light, the painter had enjoyed doing it—for the little Dutch cabbages and kettles, for the taper fingers and breezy mantles of late-coming Madonnas, for the little blue-hilled, pastoral, sceptical Italian landscapes: Then there are the days of fierce, fasti-

dious longing—solemn church-feasts of the intellect—when all vulgar effort and all petty success is a weariness, and everything but the best—the best of the best—disgusts. In these hours we are relentless aristocrats of taste. We will not take Michael Angelo for granted, we will not swallow Raphael whole!”

The gallery of the Uffizi is not only rich in its possessions, but peculiarly fortunate in that fine architectural accident, as one may call it, which unites it—with the breadth of river and city between them—to those princely chambers of the Pitti Palace. The Louvre and the Vatican hardly give you such a sense of sustained inclosure as those long passages projected over street and stream to establish a sort of inviolate transition between the two palaces of art. We passed along the gallery in which those precious drawings by eminent hands hang chaste and gray above the swirl and murmur of the yellow Arno, and reached the ducal saloons of the Pitti. Ducal as they are, it must be confessed that they are imperfect as show-rooms, and that, with their deep-set windows and their massive mouldings, it is rather a broken light that reaches the pictured walls. But here the

masterpieces hang thick, and you seem to see them in a luminous atmosphere of their own. And the great saloons, with their superb dim ceilings, their outer wall in splendid shadow, and the sombre opposite glow of mellow canvas and dusky gilding, make, themselves, almost as fine a picture as the Titians and Raphaels they imperfectly reveal. We lingered briefly before many a Raphael and Titian; but I saw my friend was impatient, and I suffered him at last to lead me directly to the goal of our journey—the most tenderly fair of Raphael's virgins, the Madonna in the Chair. Of all the fine pictures of the world, it seemed to me this is the one with which criticism has least to do. None betrays less effort, less of the mechanism of success and of the irrepressible discord between conception and result which shows dimly in so many consummate works. Graceful, human, near to our sympathies as it is, it has nothing of manner, of method, nothing, almost, of style; it blooms there in rounded softness, as instinct with harmony as if it were an immediate exhalation of genius. The figure melts away the spectator's mind into a sort of passionate tenderness which he knows not whether he has given to heavenly purity or to

earthly charm. He is intoxicated with the fragrance of the tenderest blossom of maternity that ever bloomed on earth.

“That’s what I call a fine picture,” said my companion, after we had gazed a while in silence. “I have a right to say so, for I have copied it so often and so carefully that I could repeat it now with my eyes shut. Other works are of Raphael: this *is* Raphael himself. Others you can praise, you can qualify, you can measure, explain, account for: this you can only love and admire. I don’t know in what seeming he walked among men, while this divine mood was upon him; but after it, surely, he could do nothing but die; this world had nothing more to teach him. Think of it a while, my friend, and you will admit that I am not raving. Think of his seeing that spotless image, not for a moment, for a day, in a happy dream, or a restless fever-fit; not as a poet in a five minutes’ frenzy—time to snatch his phrase and scribble his immortal stanza; but for days together, while the slow labour of the brush went on, while the foul vapours of life interposed, and the fancy ached with tension, fixed, radiant, distinct, as

we see it now ! What a master, certainly ! But ah ! what a seer !”

“Don't you imagine,” I answered, “that he had a model, and that some pretty young woman—”

“As pretty a young woman as you please ! It doesn't diminish the miracle ! He took his hint, of course, and the young woman, possibly, sat smiling before his canvas. But, meanwhile, the painter's idea had taken wings. No lovely human outline could charm it to vulgar fact. He saw the fair form made perfect ; he rose to the vision without tremor, without effort of wing ; he communed with it face to face, and resolved into finer and lovelier truth the purity which completes it as the fragrance completes the rose. That's what they call idealism ; the word's vastly abused, but the thing is good. It's my own creed, at any rate. Lovely Madonna, model at once and muse, I call you to witness that I too am an idealist !”

“An idealist, then,” I said, half jocosely, wishing to provoke him to further utterance, “is a gentleman who says to Nature in the person of a beautiful girl, ‘Go to, you are all wrong ! Your fine is coarse, your bright is dim, your grace is *gaucherie*. This is the

way you should have done it!' Is not the chance against him?"

He turned upon me almost angrily, but perceiving the genial savour of my sarcasm, he smiled gravely. "Look at that picture," he said, "and cease your irreverent mockery! Idealism is *that!* There's no explaining it; one must feel the flame! It says nothing to Nature, or to any beautiful girl, that they will not both forgive! It says to the fair woman, 'Accept me as your artist-friend, lend me your beautiful face, trust me, help me, and your eyes shall be half my masterpiece!' No one so loves and respects the rich realities of nature as the artist whose imagination caresses and flatters them. He knows what a fact may hold (whether Raphael knew, you may judge by his portrait, behind us there, of Tommaso Inghirami); but his fancy hovers above it, as Ariel hovered above the sleeping prince. There is only one Raphael, but an artist may still be an artist. As I said last night, the days of illumination are gone; visions are rare; we have to look long to see them. But in meditation we may still cultivate the ideal; round it, smooth it, perfect it. The result—the result," (here his voice faltered suddenly, and

he fixed his eyes for a moment on the picture; when they met my own again they were full of tears—"the result may be less than this; but still it may be good, it may be *great!*" he cried with vehemence. "It may hang somewhere, in after years, in goodly company, and keep the artist's memory warm. Think of being known to mankind after some such fashion as this! of hanging here through the slow centuries in the gaze of an altered world; living on and on in the cunning of an eye and hand that are part of the dust of ages, a delight and a law to remote generations; making beauty a force and purity an example!"

"Heaven forbid," I said, smiling, "that I should take the wind out of your sails! But doesn't it occur to you that besides being strong in his genius Raphael was happy in a certain good faith of which we have lost the trick? There are people, I know, who deny that his spotless Madonnas are anything more than pretty blondes of that period, enhanced by the Raphaelesque touch, which they declare is a profane touch. Be that as it may, people's religious and æsthetic needs went arm in arm, and there was, as I may say, a demand for the Blessed Virgin,

visible and adorable, which must have given firmness to the artist's hand. I am afraid there is no demand now."

My companion seemed painfully puzzled; he shivered, as it were, in this chilling blast of scepticism. Then shaking his head with sublime confidence—"There is always a demand!" he cried; "that ineffable type is one of the eternal needs of man's heart; but pious souls long for it in silence, almost in shame. Let it appear, and their faith grows brave. How *should* it appear in this corrupt generation? It cannot be made to order. It could, indeed, when the order came, trumpet-toned, from the lips of the Church herself, and was addressed to genius panting with inspiration. But it can spring now only from the soil of passionate labour and culture. Do you really fancy that while, from time to time, a man of complete artistic vision is born into the world, that image can perish? The man who paints it has painted everything. The subject admits of every perfection—form, colour, expression, composition. It can be as simple as you please, and yet as rich; as broad and pure, and yet as full of delicate detail. Think of the chance for flesh in the little

naked, nestling child, irradiating divinity; of the chance for drapery in the chaste and ample garment of the mother! think of the great story you compress into that simple theme! Think, above all, of the mother's face and its ineffable suggestiveness, of the mingled burden of joy and trouble, the tenderness turned to worship, and the worship turned to far-seeing pity! Then look at it all in perfect line and lovely colour, breathing truth and beauty and mastery!"

"Anch' io son pittore!" I cried. "Unless I am mistaken, you have a masterpiece on the stocks. If you put all that in, you will do more than Raphael himself did. Let me know when your picture is finished, and wherever in the wide world I may be, I will post back to Florence and pay my respects to—the *Madonna of the future!*"

He blushed vividly and gave a heavy sigh, half of protest, half of resignation. "I don't often mention my picture by name. I detest this modern custom of premature publicity. A great work needs silence, privacy, mystery even. And then, do you know, people are so cruel, so frivolous, so unable to imagine a man's wishing to paint a Madonna at this time of

day, that I have been laughed at—laughed at, sir!” and his blush deepened to crimson. “I don’t know what has prompted me to be so frank and trustful with you. You look as if you wouldn’t laugh at me. My dear young man”—and he laid his hand on my arm—“I am worthy of respect. Whatever my talents may be, I am honest. There is nothing grotesque in a pure ambition, or in a life devoted to it.”

There was something so sternly sincere in his look and tone, that further questions seemed impertinent. I had repeated opportunity to ask them, however; for after this we spent much time together. Daily, for a fortnight, we met by appointment, to see the sights. He knew the city so well, he had strolled and lounged so often through its streets and churches and galleries, he was so deeply versed in its greater and lesser memories, so imbued with the local genius, that he was an altogether ideal *valet de place*, and I was glad enough to leave my Murray at home, and gather facts and opinions alike from his gossiping commentary. He talked of Florence like a lover and admitted that it was a very old affair; he had lost his heart to her at first sight. “It’s the fashion to

talk of all cities as feminine," he said, "but, as a rule, it's a monstrous mistake. Is Florence of the same sex as New York, as Chicago? She is the sole perfect lady of them all; one feels towards her as a lad in his teens feels to some beautiful older woman with a 'history.' She fills you with a sort of aspiring gallantry." This disinterested passion seemed to stand my friend in stead of the common social ties; he led a lonely life, and cared for nothing but his work. I was duly flattered by his having taken my frivolous self into his favour, and by his generous sacrifice of precious hours to my society. We spent many of these hours among those early paintings in which Florence is so rich, returning ever and anon, with restless sympathies, to wonder whether these tender blossoms of art had not a vital fragrance and savour more precious than the full-fruited knowledge of the later works. We lingered often in the sepulchral chapel of San Lorenzo, and watched Michael Angelo's dim-visaged warrior sitting there like some awful Genius of Doubt and brooding behind his eternal mask upon the mysteries of life. We stood more than once in the little convent chambers where Fra Angelico wrought as if an angel indeed had held

his hand, and gathered that sense of scattered dews and early bird-notes which makes an hour among his relics seem like a morning stroll in some monkish garden. We did all this and much more—wandered into dark chapels, damp courts, and dusty palace-rooms, in quest of lingering hints of fresco and lurking treasures of carving.

I was more and more impressed with my companion's remarkable singleness of purpose. Everything was a pretext for some wildly idealistic rhapsody or reverie. Nothing could be seen or said that did not lead him sooner or later to a glowing discourse on the true, the beautiful, and the good. If my friend was not a genius, he was certainly a monomaniac ; and I found as great a fascination in watching the odd lights and shades of his character as if he had been a creature from another planet. He seemed, indeed, to know very little of this one, and lived and moved altogether in his own little province of art. A creature more unsullied by the world it is impossible to conceive, and I often thought it a flaw in his artistic character that he had not a harmless vice or two. It amused me greatly at times to think that he was of our shrewd Yankee race ;

but, after all, there could be no better token of his American origin than this high æsthetic fever. The very heat of his devotion was a sign of conversion ; those born to European opportunity manage better to reconcile enthusiasm with comfort. He had, moreover, all our native mistrust for intellectual discretion and our native relish for sonorous superlatives. As a critic he was very much more generous than just, and his mildest terms of approbation were "stupendous," "transcendent," and "incomparable." The small change of admiration seemed to him no coin for a gentleman to handle ; and yet, frank as he was intellectually, he was personally altogether a mystery. His professions, somehow, were all half-professions, and his allusions to his work and circumstances left something dimly ambiguous in the background. He was modest and proud, and never spoke of his domestic matters. He was evidently poor ; yet he must have had some slender independence, since he could afford to make so merry over the fact that his culture of ideal beauty had never brought him a penny. His poverty, I supposed, was his motive for neither inviting me to his lodging nor mentioning its whereabouts. We met either in some

public place or at my hotel, where I entertained him as freely as I might without appearing to be prompted by charity. He seemed always hungry, and this was his nearest approach to human grossness. I made a point of asking no impertinent questions, but, each time we met, I ventured to make some respectful allusion to the *magnum opus*, to inquire, as it were, as to its health and progress. "We are getting on, with the Lord's help," he would say, with a grave smile. "We are doing well. You see I have the grand advantage that I lose no time. These hours I spend with you are pure profit. They are *suggestive*! Just as the truly religious soul is always at worship, the genuine artist is always in labour. He takes his property wherever he finds it, and learns some precious secret from every object that stands up in the light. If you but knew the rapture of observation! I gather with every glance some hint for light, for colour or relief! When I get home, I pour out my treasures into the lap of my Madonna. Oh, I am not idle! *Nulla dies sine linea.*"

I was introduced in Florence to an American lady whose drawing-room had long formed an attractive place of reunion for the foreign residents. She lived

on a fourth floor, and she was not rich; but she offered her visitors very good tea, little cakes at option, and conversation not quite to match. Her conversation had mainly an æsthetic flavour, for Mrs. Coventry was famously "artistic." Her apartment was a sort of Pitti Palace *au petit pied*. She possessed "early masters" by the dozen—a cluster of Peruginos in her dining-room, a Giotto in her boudoir, an Andrea del Sarto over her drawing-room chimney-piece. Surrounded by these treasures, and by innumerable bronzes, mosaics, majolica dishes, and little worm-eaten diptychs covered with angular saints on gilded backgrounds, our hostess enjoyed the dignity of a sort of high-priestess of the arts. She always wore on her bosom a huge miniature copy of the Madonna della Seggiola. Gaining her ear quietly one evening, I asked her whether she knew that remarkable man, Mr. Theobald.

"Know him!" she exclaimed; "know poor Theobald! All Florence knows him, his flame-coloured locks, his black velvet coat, his interminable harangues on the beautiful, and his wondrous Madonna that mortal eye has never seen, and that mortal patience has quite given up expecting."

“Really,” I cried, “you don’t believe in his Madonna?”

“My dear ingenuous youth,” rejoined my shrewd friend, “has he made a convert of you? Well, we all believed in him once; he came down upon Florence and took the town by storm. Another Raphael, at the very least, had been born among men, and the poor dear United States were to have the credit of him. Hadn’t he the very hair of Raphael flowing down on his shoulders? The hair, alas, but not the head! We swallowed him whole, however; we hung upon his lips and proclaimed his genius on the rooftops. The women were all dying to sit to him for their portraits and be made immortal, like Leonardo’s Joconde. We decided that his manner was a good deal like Leonardo’s—mysterious, and inscrutable, and fascinating. Mysterious it certainly was; mystery was the beginning and the end of it. The months passed by, and the miracle hung fire; our master never produced his masterpiece. He passed hours in the galleries and churches, posturing, musing, and gazing; he talked more than ever about the beautiful, but he never put brush to canvas. We had all subscribed, as it were, to the great performance; but

as it never came off, people began to ask for their money again. I was one of the last of the faithful; I carried devotion so far as to sit to him for my head. If you could have seen the horrible creature he made of me, you would admit that even a woman with no more vanity than will tie her bonnet straight must have cooled off then. The man didn't know the very alphabet of drawing! His strong point, he intimated, was his sentiment; but is it a consolation, when one has been painted a fright, to know it has been done with peculiar gusto? One by one, I confess, we fell away from the faith, and Mr. Theobald didn't lift his little finger to preserve us. At the first hint that we were tired of waiting, and that we should like the show to begin, he was off in a huff. 'Great work requires time, contemplation, privacy, mystery! O ye of little faith!' We answered that we didn't insist on a great work; that the five-act tragedy might come at his convenience; that we merely asked for something to keep us from yawning, some inexpensive little *lever de rideau*. Hereupon the poor man took his stand as a genius misconceived and persecuted, an *âme méconnue*, and washed his hands of us from that hour! No, I believe he does me the

honour to consider me the head and front of the conspiracy formed to nip his glory in the bud—a bud that has taken twenty years to blossom. Ask him if he knows me, and he will tell you I am a horribly ugly old woman who has vowed his destruction because he won't paint her portrait as a pendant to Titian's Flora. I fancy that since then he has had none but chance followers, innocent strangers like yourself, who have taken him at his word. The mountain is still in labour; I have not heard that the mouse has been born. I pass him once in a while in the galleries, and he fixes his great dark eyes on me with a sublimity of indifference, as if I were a bad copy of a Sassoferrato! It is a long time ago now that I heard that he was making studies for a Madonna who was to be a *résumé* of all the other Madonnas of the Italian school—like that antique Venus who borrowed a nose from one great image and an ankle from another. It's certainly a masterly idea. The parts may be fine, but when I think of my unhappy portrait I tremble for the whole. He has communicated this striking idea under the pledge of solemn secrecy to fifty chosen spirits, to every one he has ever been able to button-hole for five minutes.

I suppose he wants to get an order for it, and he is not to blame ; for Heaven knows how he lives. I see by your blush," my hostess frankly continued, " that you have been honoured with his confidence. You needn't be ashamed, my dear young man ; a man of your age is none the worse for a certain generous credulity. Only allow me to give you a word of advice : keep your credulity out of your pockets ! Don't pay for the picture till it's delivered. You have not been treated to a peep at it, I imagine ? No more have your fifty predecessors in the faith. There are people who doubt whether there is any picture to be seen. I fancy, myself, that if one were to get into his studio, one would find something very like the picture in that tale of Balzac's—a mere mass of incoherent scratches and daubs, a jumble of dead paint !"

I listened to this pungent recital in silent wonder. It had a painfully plausible sound, and was not inconsistent with certain shy suspicions of my own. My hostess was not only a clever woman, but presumably a generous one. I determined to let my judgment wait upon events. Possibly she was right ; but if she was wrong, she was cruelly wrong ! Her

version of my friend's eccentricities made me impatient to see him again and examine him in the light of public opinion. On our next meeting I immediately asked him if he knew Mrs. Coventry. He laid his hand on my arm and gave me a sad smile. "Has she taxed *your* gallantry at last?" he asked. "She's a foolish woman. She's frivolous and heartless, and she pretends to be serious and kind. She prattles about Giotto's second manner and Vittoria Colonna's liaison with 'Michael'—one would think that Michael lived across the way and was expected in to take a hand at whist—but she knows as little about art, and about the conditions of production, as I know about Buddhism. She profanes sacred words," he added more vehemently, after a pause. "She cares for you only as some one to hand teacups in that horrible mendacious little parlour of hers, with its trumpery Peruginos! If you can't dash off a new picture every three days, and let her hand it round among her guests, she tells them in plain English that you are an impostor!"

This attempt of mine to test Mrs. Coventry's accuracy was made in the course of a late afternoon walk to the quiet old church of San Miniato, on

one of the hill-tops which directly overlook the city, from whose gates you are guided to it by a stony and cypress-bordered walk, which seems a very fitting avenue to a shrine. No spot is more propitious to lingering repose¹ than the broad terrace in front of the church, where, lounging against the parapet, you may glance in slow alternation from the black and yellow marbles of the church-façade, seamed and cracked with time and wind-sown with a tender flora of its own, down to the full domes and slender towers of Florence and over to the blue sweep of the wide-mouthed cup of mountains into whose hollow the little treasure-city has been dropped. I had proposed, as a diversion from the painful memories evoked by Mrs. Coventry's name, that Theobald should go with me the next evening to the opera, where some rarely played work was to be given. He declined, as I half expected, for I had observed that he regularly kept his evenings in reserve, and never alluded to his manner of passing them. "You have reminded me before," I said smiling, "of that charming speech of the Florentine painter in Alfred de Musset's 'Lorenzaccio': '*I do*

¹ 1869.

no harm to any one. I pass my days in my studio. On Sunday I go to the Annunziata or to Santa Maria; the monks think I have a voice; they dress me in a white gown and a red cap, and I take a share in the choruses; sometimes I do a little solo: these are the only times I go into public. In the evening, I visit my sweetheart; when the night is fine, we pass it on her balcony. I don't know whether you have a sweetheart, or whether she has a balcony. But if you are so happy, it's certainly better than trying to find a charm in a third-rate prima donna."

He made no immediate response, but at last he turned to me solemnly. "Can you look upon a beautiful woman with reverent eyes?"

"Really," I said, "I don't pretend to be sheepish, but I should be sorry to think I was impudent." And I asked him what in the world he meant. When at last I had assured him that I could undertake to temper admiration with respect, he informed me, with an air of religious mystery, that it was in his power to introduce me to the most beautiful woman in Italy—"A beauty with a soul!"

"Upon my word," I cried, "you are extremely fortunate, and that is a most attractive description."

“This woman’s beauty,” he went on, “is a lesson, a morality, a poem! It’s my daily study.”

Of course, after this, I lost no time in reminding him of what, before we parted, had taken the shape of a promise. “I feel somehow,” he had said, “as if it were a sort of violation of that privacy in which I have always contemplated her beauty. This is friendship, my friend. No hint of her existence has ever fallen from my lips. But with too great a familiarity we are apt to lose a sense of the real value of things, and you perhaps will throw some new light upon it and offer a fresher interpretation.”

We went accordingly by appointment to a certain ancient house in the heart of Florence—the precinct of the Mercato Vecchio—and climbed a dark, steep staircase, to the very summit of the edifice. Theobald’s beauty seemed as loftily exalted above the line of common vision as his artistic ideal was lifted above the usual practice of men. He passed without knocking into the dark vestibule of a small apartment, and, flinging open an inner door, ushered me into a small saloon. The room seemed mean and sombre, though I caught a glimpse of white curtains swaying gently at an open window. At a table, near

a lamp, sat a woman dressed in black, working at a piece of embroidery. As Theobald entered, she looked up calmly, with a smile; but seeing me, she made a movement of surprise, and rose with a kind of stately grace. Theobald stepped forward, took her hand and kissed it, with an indescribable air of immemorial usage. As he bent his head, she looked at me askance, and I thought she blushed.

“Behold the Serafina!” said Theobald, frankly, waving me forward. “This is a friend, and a lover of the arts,” he added, introducing me. I received a smile, a curtsey, and a request to be seated.

The most beautiful woman in Italy was a person of a generous Italian type and of a great simplicity of demeanour. Seated again at her lamp, with her embroidery, she seemed to have nothing whatever to say. Theobald, bending towards her in a sort of Platonic ecstasy, asked her a dozen paternally tender questions as to her health, her state of mind, her occupations, and the progress of her embroidery, which he examined minutely and summoned me to admire. It was some portion of an ecclesiastical vestment—yellow satin wrought with an elaborate design of silver and gold. She made answer in a

full, rich voice, but with a brevity which I hesitated whether to attribute to native reserve or to the profane constraint of my presence. She had been that morning to confession ; she had also been to market, and had bought a chicken for dinner. She felt very happy ; she had nothing to complain of, except that the people for whom she was making her vestment, and who furnished her materials, should be willing to put such rotten silver thread into the garment, as one might say, of the Lord. From time to time, as she took her slow stitches, she raised her eyes and covered me with a glance which seemed at first to denote a placid curiosity, but in which, as I saw it repeated, I thought I perceived the dim glimmer of an attempt to establish an understanding with me at the expense of our companion. Meanwhile, as mindful as possible of Theobald's injunction of reverence, I considered the lady's personal claims to the fine compliment he had paid her.

That she was indeed a beautiful woman I perceived, after recovering from the surprise of finding her without the freshness of youth. Her beauty was of a sort which, in losing youth, loses little of its essential charm, expressed for the most part as it was in form

and structure, and, as Theobald would have said, in "composition." She was broad and ample, low-browed and large-eyed, dark and pale. Her thick brown hair hung low beside her cheek and ear, and seemed to drape her head with a covering as chaste and formal as the veil of a nun. The poise and carriage of her head were admirably free and noble, and they were the more effective that their freedom was at moments discreetly corrected by a little sanctionious droop, which harmonised admirably with the level gaze of her dark and quiet eye. A strong, serene, physical nature, and the placid temper which comes of no nerves and no troubles, seemed this lady's comfortable portion. She was dressed in plain dull black, save for a sort of dark blue kerchief which was folded across her bosom and exposed a glimpse of her massive throat. Over this kerchief was suspended a little silver cross. I admired her greatly, and yet with a large reserve. A certain mild intellectual apathy belonged properly to her type of beauty, and had always seemed to round and enrich it; but this *bourgeoise* Egeria, if I viewed her right, betrayed a rather vulgar stagnation of mind. There might have been once a dim spiritual light in her

face; but it had long since begun to wane. And furthermore, in plain prose, she was growing stout. My disappointment amounted very nearly to complete disenchantment when Theobald, as if to facilitate my covert inspection, declaring that the lamp was very dim and that she would ruin her eyes without more light, rose and fetched a couple of candles from the mantelpiece, which he placed lighted on the table. In this brighter illumination I perceived that our hostess was decidedly an elderly woman. She was neither haggard nor worn nor grey; she was simply coarse. The "soul" which Theobald had promised seemed scarcely worth making such a point of; it was no deeper mystery than a sort of matronly mildness of lip and brow. I should have been ready even to declare that that sanctified bend of the head was nothing more than the trick of a person constantly working at embroidery. It occurred to me even that it was a trick of a less innocent sort; for, in spite of the mellow quietude of her wits, this stately needlewoman dropped a hint that she took the situation rather less seriously than her friend. When he rose to light the candles, she looked across at me with a quick, intelligent smile, and

tapped her forehead with her forefinger; then, as from a sudden feeling of compassionate loyalty to poor Theobald, I preserved a blank face, she gave a little shrug and resumed her work.

What was the relation of this singular couple? Was he the most ardent of friends or the most reverent of lovers? Did she regard him as an eccentric swain whose benevolent admiration of her beauty she was not ill-pleased to humour at this small cost of having him climb into her little parlour and gossip of summer nights? With her decent and sombre dress, her simple gravity, and that fine piece of priestly needlework, she looked like some pious lay-member of a sisterhood, living by special permission outside her convent walls. Or was she maintained here aloft by her friend in comfortable leisure, so that he might have before him the perfect, eternal type, uncorrupted and untarnished by the struggle for existence? Her shapely hands, I observed, were very fair and white; they lacked the traces of what is called honest toil.

“And the pictures, how do they come on?” she asked of Theobald, after a long pause.

“Finely, finely! I have here a friend whose

sympathy and encouragement give me new faith and ardour."

Our hostess turned to me, gazed at me a moment rather inscrutably, and then tapping her forehead with the gesture she had used a minute before, "He has a magnificent genius!" she said, with perfect gravity.

"I am inclined to think so," I answered, with a smile.

"Eh, why do you smile?" she cried. "If you doubt it, you must see the *bambino!*" And she took the lamp and conducted me to the other side of the room, where on the wall, in a plain black frame, hung a large drawing in red chalk. Beneath it was fastened a little bowl for holy-water. The drawing represented a very young child, entirely naked, half nestling back against his mother's gown, but with his two little arms outstretched, as if in the act of benediction. It was executed with singular freedom and power, and yet seemed vivid with the sacred bloom of infancy. A sort of dimpled elegance and grace, mingled with its boldness, recalled the touch of Correggio. "That's what he can do!" said my hostess. "It's the

blessed little boy whom I lost. It's his very image, and the Signor Teobaldo gave it me as a gift. He has given me many things besides!"

I looked at the picture for some time and admired it immensely. Turning back to Theobald, I assured him that if it were hung among the drawings in the Uffizi and labelled with a glorious name, it would hold its own. My praise seemed to give him extreme pleasure; he pressed my hands, and his eyes filled with tears. It moved him apparently with the desire to expatiate on the history of the drawing, for he rose and made his adieux to our companion, kissing her hand with the same mild ardour as before. It occurred to me that the offer of a similar piece of gallantry on my own part might help me to know what manner of woman she was. When she perceived my intention, she withdrew her hand, dropped her eyes solemnly, and made me a severe curtsey. Theobald took my arm and led me rapidly into the street.

"And what do you think of the divine Serafina?" he cried with fervour.

"It is certainly an excellent style of good looks!" I answered.

He eyed me an instant askance, and then seemed hurried along by the current of remembrance. "You should have seen the mother and the child together, seen them as I first saw them—the mother with her head draped in a shawl, a divine trouble in her face, and the bambino pressed to her bosom. You would have said, I think, that Raphael had found his match in common chance. I was coming in, one summer night, from a long walk in the country, when I met this apparition at the city gate. The woman held out her hand. I hardly knew whether to say, 'What do you want?' or to fall down and worship. She asked for a little money. I saw that she was beautiful and pale; she might have stepped out of the stable of Bethlehem! I gave her money and helped her on her way into the town. I had guessed her story. She, too, was a maiden mother, and she had been turned out into the world in her shame. I felt in all my pulses that here was my subject marvelously realised. I felt like one of the old monkish artists who had had a vision. I rescued the poor creatures, cherished them, watched them as I would have done some precious work of art, some lovely

fragment of fresco discovered in a mouldering cloister. In a month—as if to deepen and sanctify the sadness and sweetness of it all—the poor little child died. When she felt that he was going, she held him up to me for ten minutes, and I made that sketch. You saw a feverish haste in it, I suppose; I wanted to spare the poor little mortal the pain of his position. After that, I doubly valued the mother. She is the simplest, sweetest, most natural creature that ever bloomed in this brave old land of Italy. She lives in the memory of her child, in her gratitude for the scanty kindness I have been able to show her, and in her simple religion! She is not even conscious of her beauty; my admiration has never made her vain. Heaven knows that I have made no secret of it. You must have observed the singular transparency of her expression, the lovely modesty of her glance. And was there ever such a truly virginal brow, such a natural classic elegance in the wave of the hair and the arch of the forehead? I have studied her; I may say I know her. I have absorbed her little by little; my mind is stamped and imbued, and I have determined now to clinch

the impression ; I shall at last invite her to sit for me !”

“ ‘ At last—at last ’ ? ” I repeated, in much amazement. “ Do you mean that she has never done so yet ? ”

“ I have not really had—a—a sitting,” said Theobald, speaking very slowly. “ I have taken notes, you know ; I have got my grand fundamental impression. That’s the great thing ! But I have not actually had her as a model, posed and draped and lighted, before my easel.”

What had become for the moment of my perception and my tact I am at a loss to say ; in their absence, I was unable to repress a headlong exclamation. I was destined to regret it. We had stopped at a turning, beneath a lamp. “ My poor friend,” I exclaimed, laying my hand on his shoulder, “ you have *dawdled* ! She’s an old, old woman—for a Madonna ! ”

It was as if I had brutally struck him ; I shall never forget the long, slow, almost ghastly look of pain with which he answered me.

“ Dawdled ?—old, old ? ” he stammered. “ Are you joking ? ”

“Why, my dear fellow, I suppose you don't take her for a woman of twenty?”

He drew a long breath and leaned against a house, looking at me with questioning, protesting, reproachful eyes. At last, starting forward, and grasping my arm — “Answer me solemnly : does she seem to you truly old? Is she wrinkled, is she faded, am I blind?”

Then at last I understood the immensity of his illusion ; how, one by one, the noiseless years had ebbed away and left him brooding in charmed inaction, for ever preparing for a work for ever deferred. It seemed to me almost a kindness now to tell him the plain truth. “I should be sorry to say you are blind,” I answered, “but I think you are deceived. You have lost time in effortless contemplation. Your friend was once young and fresh and virginal ; but, I protest, that was some years ago. Still, she has *de beaux restes*. By all means make her sit for you!” I broke down ; his face was too horribly reproachful.

He took off his hat and stood passing his handkerchief mechanically over his forehead. “*De beaux restes?* I thank you for sparing me the plain English. I must make up my Madonna out of *de*

beaux restes! What a masterpiece she will be! Old—old! Old—old!” he murmured.

“Never mind her age,” I cried, revolted at what I had done, “never mind my impression of her! You have your memory, your notes, your genius. Finish your picture in a month. I pronounce it beforehand a masterpiece, and I hereby offer you for it any sum you may choose to ask.”

He stared, but he seemed scarcely to understand me. “Old—old!” he kept stupidly repeating. “If she is old, what am I? If her beauty has faded, where—where is my strength? Has life been a dream? Have I worshipped too long—have I loved too well?” The charm, in truth, was broken. That the chord of illusion should have snapped at my light accidental touch showed how it had been weakened by excessive tension. The poor fellow’s sense of wasted time, of vanished opportunity, seemed to roll in upon his soul in waves of darkness. He suddenly dropped his head and burst into tears.

I led him homeward with all possible tenderness, but I attempted neither to check his grief, to restore his equanimity, nor to unsay the hard truth. When we reached my hotel I tried to induce him to come

in. "We will drink a glass of wine," I said, smiling, "to the completion of the Madonna."

With a violent effort he held up his head, mused for a moment with a formidably sombre frown, and then giving me his hand, "I will finish it," he cried, "in a month! No, in a fortnight! After all, I have it *here!*" And he tapped his forehead. "Of course she's old! She can afford to have it said of her—a woman who has made twenty years pass like a twelvemonth! Old—old! Why, sir, she shall be eternal!"

I wished to see him safely to his own door, but he waved me back and walked away with an air of resolution, whistling and swinging his cane. I waited a moment, and then followed him at a distance, and saw him proceed to cross the Santa Trinità Bridge. When he reached the middle, he suddenly paused, as if his strength had deserted him, and leaned upon the parapet gazing over into the river. I was careful to keep him in sight; I confess that I passed ten very nervous minutes. He recovered himself at last, and went his way, slowly and with hanging head.

That I had really startled poor Theobald into

a bolder use of his long-garnered stores of knowledge and taste, into the vulgar effort and hazard of production, seemed at first reason enough for his continued silence, and absence; but as day followed day without his either calling or sending me a line, and without my meeting him in his customary haunts, in the galleries, in the chapel at San Lorenzo, or strolling between the Arno-side and the great hedge-screen of verdure which, along the drive of the Cascine, throws the fair occupants of barouche and phaeton into such becoming relief—as for more than a week I got neither tidings nor sight of him, I began to fear that I had fatally offended him, and that, instead of giving a wholesome impetus to his talent, I had brutally paralysed it. I had a wretched suspicion that I had made him ill. My stay at Florence was drawing to a close, and it was important that, before resuming my journey, I should assure myself of the truth. Theobald, to the last, had kept his lodging a mystery, and I was altogether at a loss where to look for him. The simplest course was to make inquiry of the beauty of the Mercato Vecchio, and I confess that unsatisfied curiosity as to the lady herself counselled it as well. Perhaps I had done her injustice,

and she was as immortally fresh and fair as he conceived her. I was, at any rate, anxious to behold once more the ripe enchantress who had made twenty years pass as a twelvemonth. I repaired accordingly, one morning, to her abode, climbed the interminable staircase, and reached her door. It stood ajar, and as I hesitated whether to enter, a little serving-maid came clattering out with an empty kettle, as if she had just performed some savoury errand. The inner door, too, was open ; so I crossed the little vestibule and entered the room in which I had formerly been received. It had not its evening aspect. The table, or one end of it, was spread for a late breakfast, and before it sat a gentleman—an individual, at least, of the male sex—doing execution upon a beefsteak and onions, and a bottle of wine. At his elbow, in friendly proximity, was placed the lady of the house. Her attitude, as I entered, was not that of an enchantress. With one hand she held in her lap a plate of smoking macaroni ; with the other she had lifted high in air one of the pendulous filaments of this succulent compound, and was in the act of slipping it gently down her throat. On the uncovered end of the table, facing her companion, were ranged half

a dozen small statuettes, of some snuff-coloured substance resembling terra-cotta. He, brandishing his knife with ardour, was apparently descanting on their merits.

Evidently I darkened the door. My hostess dropped her macaroni—into her mouth, and rose hastily with a harsh exclamation and a flushed face. I immediately perceived that the Signora Serafina's secret was even better worth knowing than I had supposed, and that the way to learn it was to take it for granted. I summoned my best Italian, I smiled and bowed and apologised for my intrusion ; and in a moment, whether or no I had dispelled the lady's irritation, I had at least stimulated her prudence. I was welcome, she said ; I must take a seat. This was another friend of hers—also an artist, she declared with a smile which was almost amiable. Her companion wiped his moustache and bowed with great civility. I saw at a glance that he was equal to the situation. He was presumably the author of the statuettes on the table, and he knew a money-spending *forestière* when he saw one. He was a small, wiry man, with a clever, impudent, tossed-up nose, a sharp little black eye, and waxed ends to his moustache.

On the side of his head he wore jauntily a little crimson velvet smoking-cap, and I observed that his feet were encased in brilliant slippers. On Serafina's remarking with dignity that I was the friend of Mr. Theobald, he broke out into that fantastic French of which certain Italians are so insistently lavish, and declared with fervour that Mr. Theobald was a magnificent genius.

"I am sure I don't know," I answered with a shrug. "If you are in a position to affirm it, you have the advantage of me. I have seen nothing from his hand but the bambino yonder, which certainly is fine."

He declared that the bambino was a masterpiece, a pure Correggio. It was only a pity, he added with a knowing laugh, that the sketch had not been made on some good bit of honeycombed old panel. The stately Serafina hereupon protested that Mr. Theobald was the soul of honour, and that he would never lend himself to a deceit. "I am not a judge of genius," she said, "and I know nothing of pictures. I am but a poor simple widow; but I know that the Signor Teobaldo has the heart of an angel and the virtue of a saint. He is my benefactor," she added sententiously. The after-glow of the some-

what sinister flush with which she had greeted me still lingered in her cheek, and perhaps did not favour her beauty; I could not but fancy it a wise custom of Theobald's to visit her only by candle-light. She was coarse, and her poor adorer was a poet.

"I have the greatest esteem for him," I said; "it is for this reason that I have been uneasy at not seeing him for ten days. Have you seen him? Is he perhaps ill?"

"Ill! Heaven forbid!" cried Serafina, with genuine vehemence.

Her companion uttered a rapid expletive, and reproached her with not having been to see him. She hesitated a moment; then she simpered the least bit and bridled. "He comes to see me—without reproach! But it would not be the same for me to go to him, though, indeed, you may almost call him a man of holy life."

"He has the greatest admiration for you," I said. "He would have been honoured by your visit."

She looked at me a moment sharply. "More admiration than you. Admit that!" Of course I protested with all the eloquence at my command, and

my mysterious hostess then confessed that she had taken no fancy to me on my former visit, and that, Theobald not having returned, she believed I had poisoned his mind against her. "It would be no kindness to the poor gentleman, I can tell you that," she said. "He has come to see me every evening for years. It's a long friendship! No one knows him as well as I."

"I don't pretend to know him, or to understand him," I said. "He's a mystery! Nevertheless, he seems to me a little—" And I touched my forehead and waved my hand in the air.

Serafina glanced at her companion a moment, as if for inspiration. He contented himself with shrugging his shoulders, as he filled his glass again. The *padrona* hereupon gave me a more softly insinuating smile than would have seemed likely to bloom on so candid a brow. "It's for that that I love him!" she said. "The world has so little kindness for such persons. It laughs at them, and despises them, and cheats them. He is too good for this wicked life! It's his fancy that he finds a little Paradise up here in my poor apartment. If he thinks so, how can I help it? He has a strange belief—really, I ought to be .

ashamed to tell you—that I resemble the Blessed Virgin : Heaven forgive me ! I let him think what he pleases, so long as it makes him happy. He was very kind to me once, and I am not one that forgets a favour. So I receive him every evening civilly, and ask after his health, and let him look at me on this side and that ! For that matter, I may say it without vanity, I was worth looking at once ! And he's not always amusing, poor man ! He sits sometimes for an hour without speaking a word, or else he talks away, without stopping, on art and nature, and beauty and duty, and fifty fine things that are all so much Latin to me. I beg you to understand that he has never said a word to me that I mightn't decently listen to. He may be a little cracked, but he's one of the blessed saints."

"Eh !" cried the man, "the blessed saints were all a little cracked !"

Serafina, I fancied, left part of her story untold ; but she told enough of it to make poor Theobald's own statement seem intensely pathetic in its exalted simplicity. "It's a strange fortune, certainly," she went on, "to have such a friend as this dear man—a friend who is less than a lover and more than a

friend." I glanced at her companion, who preserved an impenetrable smile, twisted the end of his moustache, and disposed of a copious mouthful. Was *he* less than a lover? "But what will you have?" Serafina pursued. "In this hard world one must not ask too many questions; one must take what comes and keep what one gets. I have kept my good friend for twenty years, and I do hope that, at this time of day, signore, you have not come to turn him against me!"

I assured her that I had no such design, and that I should vastly regret disturbing Mr. Theobald's habits or convictions. On the contrary, I was alarmed about him, and I should immediately go in search of him. She gave me his address and a florid account of her sufferings at his non-appearance. She had not been to him, for various reasons; chiefly because she was afraid of displeasing him, as he had always made such a mystery of his home. "You might have sent this gentleman!" I ventured to suggest.

"Ah," cried the gentleman, "he admires the Signora Serafina, but he wouldn't admire me." And then, confidentially, with his finger on his nose, "He's a purist!"

I was about to withdraw, after having promised that I would inform the Signora Serafina of my friend's condition, when her companion, who had risen from table and girded his loins apparently for the onset, grasped me gently by the arm, and led me before the row of statuettes. "I perceive by your conversation, signore, that you are a patron of the arts. Allow me to request your honourable attention for these modest products of my own ingenuity. They are brand-new, fresh from my atelier, and have never been exhibited in public. I have brought them here to receive the verdict of this dear lady, who is a good critic, for all she may pretend to the contrary. I am the inventor of this peculiar style of statuette—of subject, manner, material, everything. Touch them, I pray you; handle them freely—you needn't fear. Delicate as they look, it is impossible they should break! My various creations have met with great success. They are especially admired by Americans. I have sent them all over Europe—to London, Paris, Vienna! You may have observed some little specimens in Paris, on the Boulevard, in a shop of which they constitute the specialty. There is always a crowd about the window. They form a very

pleasing ornament for the mantelshelf of a gay young bachelor, for the boudoir of a pretty woman. You couldn't make a prettier present to a person with whom you wished to exchange a harmless joke. It is not classic art, signore, of course; but, between ourselves, isn't classic art sometimes rather a bore? Caricature, burlesque, *la charge*, as the French say, has hitherto been confined to paper, to the pen and pencil. Now, it has been my inspiration to introduce it into statuary. For this purpose I have invented a peculiar plastic compound which you will permit me not to divulge. That's my secret, signore! It's as light, you perceive, as cork, and yet as firm as alabaster! I frankly confess that I really pride myself as much on this little stroke of chemical ingenuity as upon the other element of novelty in my creations—my types. What do you say to my types, signore? The idea is bold; does it strike you as happy? Cats and monkeys—monkeys and cats—all human life is there! Human life, of course, I mean, viewed with the eye of the satirist! To combine sculpture and satire, signore, has been my unprecedented ambition. I flatter myself that I have not egregiously failed."

As this jaunty Juvenal of the chimney-piece

delivered himself of his persuasive allocution, he took up his little groups successively from the table, held them aloft, turned them about, rapped them with his knuckles, and gazed at them lovingly, with his head on one side. They consisted each of a cat and a monkey, fantastically draped, in some preposterously sentimental conjunction. They exhibited a certain sameness of motive, and illustrated chiefly the different phases of what, in delicate terms, may be called gallantry and coquetry; but they were strikingly clever and expressive, and were at once very perfect cats and monkeys and very natural men and women. I confess, however, that they failed to amuse me. I was doubtless not in a mood to enjoy them, for they seemed to me peculiarly cynical and vulgar. Their imitative felicity was revolting. As I looked askance at the complacent little artist, brandishing them between finger and thumb and caressing them with an amorous eye, he seemed to me himself little more than an exceptionally intelligent ape. I mustered an admiring grin, however, and he blew another blast. "My figures are studied from life! I have a little menagerie of monkeys whose frolics I contemplate by the hour. As for the cats, one has

only to look out of one's back window! Since I have begun to examine these expressive little brutes, I have made many profound observations. Speaking, signore, to a man of imagination, I may say that my little designs are not without a philosophy of their own. Truly, I don't know whether the cats and monkeys imitate us, or whether it's we who imitate them." I congratulated him on his philosophy, and he resumed: "You will do me the honour to admit that I have handled my subjects with delicacy. Eh, it was needed, signore! I have been free, but not too free—eh? Just a hint, you know! You may see as much or as little as you please. These little groups, however, are no measure of my invention. If you will favour me with a call at my studio, I think that you will admit that my combinations are really infinite. I likewise execute figures to command. You have perhaps some little motive—the fruit of your philosophy of life, signore—which you would like to have interpreted. I can promise to work it up to your satisfaction; it shall be as malicious as you please! Allow me to present you with my card, and to remind you that my prices are moderate. Only sixty francs for a little group like

that. My statuettes are as durable as bronze—*ære perennius*, signore—and, between ourselves, I think they are more amusing!”

As I pocketed his card, I glanced at Madonna Serafina, wondering whether she had an eye for contrasts. She had picked up one of the little couples and was tenderly dusting it with a feather broom.

What I had just seen and heard had so deepened my compassionate interest in my deluded friend that I took a summary leave, making my way directly to the house designated by this remarkable woman. It was in an obscure corner of the opposite side of the town, and presented a sombre and squalid appearance. An old woman in the doorway, on my inquiring for Theobald, ushered me in with a mumbled blessing and an expression of relief at the poor gentleman having a friend. His lodging seemed to consist of a single room at the top of the house. On getting no answer to my knock, I opened the door, supposing that he was absent; so that it gave me a certain shock to find him sitting there helpless and dumb. He was seated near the single window, facing an easel which supported a large canvas. On my entering, he looked up at me blankly, without

changing his position, which was that of absolute lassitude and dejection, his arms loosely folded, his legs stretched before him, his head hanging on his breast. Advancing into the room, I perceived that his face vividly corresponded with his attitude. He was pale, haggard, and unshaven, and his dull and sunken eye gazed at me without a spark of recognition. I had been afraid that he would greet me with fierce reproaches, as the cruelly officious patron who had turned his contentment to bitterness, and I was relieved to find that my appearance awakened no visible resentment. "Don't you know me?" I asked, as I put out my hand. "Have you already forgotten me?"

He made no response, kept his position stupidly, and left me staring about the room. It spoke most plaintively for itself. Shabby, sordid, naked, it contained, beyond the wretched bed, but the scantiest provision for personal comfort. It was bedroom at once and studio—a grim ghost of a studio. A few dusty casts and prints on the walls, three or four old canvases turned face inward, and a rusty-looking colour-box formed, with the easel at the window, the sum of its appurtenances. The place savoured

horribly of poverty. Its only wealth was the picture on the easel, presumably the famous Madonna. Averted as this was from the door, I was unable to see its face; but at last, sickened by the vacant misery of the spot, I passed behind Theobald, eagerly and tenderly. I can hardly say that I was surprised at what I found—a canvas that was a mere dead blank, cracked and discoloured by time. This was his immortal work! Though not surprised, I confess I was powerfully moved, and I think that for five minutes I could not have trusted myself to speak. At last, my silent nearness affected him; he stirred and turned, and then rose and looked at me with a slowly kindling eye. I murmured some kind, ineffective nothings about his being ill and needing advice and care, but he seemed absorbed in the effort to recall distinctly what had last passed between us. “You were right,” he said with a pitiful smile, “I am a dawdler! I am a failure! I shall do nothing more in this world. You opened my eyes; and, though the truth is bitter, I bear you no grudge. Amen! I have been sitting here for a week, face to face with the truth, with the past, with my weakness and poverty and nullity. I shall

never touch a brush! I believe I have neither eaten nor slept. Look at that canvas!" he went on, as I relieved my emotion in an urgent request that he would come home with me and dine. "That was to have contained my masterpiece! Isn't it a promising foundation? The elements of it are all *here*." And he tapped his forehead with that mystic confidence which had marked the gesture before: "If I could only transpose them into some brain that has the hand, the will! Since I have been sitting here taking stock of my intellects, I have come to believe that I have the material for a hundred masterpieces. But my hand is paralysed now, and they will never be painted. I never began! I waited and waited to be worthier to begin, and wasted my life in preparation. While I fancied my creation was growing, it was dying. I have taken it all too hard! Michael Angelo didn't, when he went at the Lorenzo! He did his best at a venture, and his venture is immortal. *That's mine!*" And he pointed with a gesture I shall never forget at the empty canvas. "I suppose we are a genus by ourselves in the providential scheme—we talents that can't act, that can't do nor dare! We take it

out in talk, in plans and promises, in study, in visions! But our visions, let me tell you," he cried, with a toss of his head, "have a way of being brilliant, and a man has not lived in vain who has seen the things I have seen! Of course you will not believe in them when that bit of worm-eaten cloth is all I have to show for them; but to convince you, to enchant and astound the world, I need only the hand of Raphael. His brain I already have. A pity, you will say, that I haven't his modesty! Ah, let me boast and babble now; it's all I have left! I am the half of a genius! Where in the wide world is my other half? Lodged perhaps in the vulgar soul, the cunning, ready fingers of some dull copyist or some trivial artisan who turns out by the dozen his easy prodigies of touch! But it's not for me to sneer at him; he at least does something. He's not a dawdler! Well for me if I had been vulgar and clever and reckless, if I could have shut my eyes and taken my leap."

What to say to the poor fellow, what to do for him, seemed hard to determine; I chiefly felt that I must break the spell of his present inaction, and remove

him from the haunted atmosphere of the little room it was such a cruel irony to call a studio. I cannot say I persuaded him to come out with me ; he simply suffered himself to be led, and when we began to walk in the open air I was able to appreciate his pitifully weakened condition. Nevertheless, he seemed in a certain way to revive, and murmured at last that he should like to go to the Pitti Gallery. I shall never forget our melancholy stroll through those gorgeous halls, every picture on whose walls seemed, even to my own sympathetic vision, to glow with a sort of insolent renewal of strength and lustre. The eyes and lips of the great portraits appeared to smile in ineffable scorn of the dejected pretender who had dreamed of competing with their triumphant authors ; the celestial candour, even, of the Madonna of the Chair, as we paused in perfect silence before her, was tinged with the sinister irony of the women of Leonardo. Perfect silence indeed marked our whole progress—the silence of a deep farewell ; for I felt in all my pulses, as Theobald, leaning on my arm, dragged one heavy foot after the other, that he was looking his last. When we came out, he was so exhausted that instead of

taking him to my hotel to dine, I called a carriage and drove him straight to his own poor lodging. He had sunk into an extraordinary lethargy; he lay back in the carriage, with his eyes closed, as pale as death, his faint breathing interrupted at intervals by a sudden gasp, like a smothered sob or a vain attempt to speak. With the help of the old woman who had admitted me before, and who emerged from a dark back court, I contrived to lead him up the long steep staircase and lay him on his wretched bed. To her I gave him in charge, while I prepared in all haste to seek a physician. But she followed me out of the room with a pitiful clasping of her hands.

“Poor, dear, blessed gentleman,” she murmured; “is he dying?”

“Possibly. How long has he been thus?”

“Since a certain night he passed ten days ago. I came up in the morning to make his poor bed, and found him sitting up in his clothes before that great canvas he keeps there. Poor, dear, strange man, he says his prayers to it! He had not been to bed, nor since then, properly! What has happened to him? Has he found out about the Serafina?” she

whispered with a glittering eye and a toothless grin.

“Prove at least that one old woman can be faithful,” I said, “and watch him well till I come back.” My return was delayed, through the absence of the English physician, who was away on a round of visits and whom I vainly pursued from house to house before I overtook him. I brought him to Theobald’s bedside none too soon. A violent fever had seized our patient, and the case was evidently grave. A couple of hours later I knew that he had brain-fever. From this moment I was with him constantly; but I am far from wishing to describe his illness. Excessively painful to witness, it was happily brief. Life burned out in delirium. One night in particular that I passed at his pillow, listening to his wild snatches of regret, of aspiration, of rapture and awe at the phantasmal pictures with which his brain seemed to swarm, comes back to my memory now like some stray page from a lost masterpiece of tragedy. Before a week was over we had buried him in the little Protestant cemetery on the way to Fiesole. The Signora Serafina, whom I had caused to be informed of his illness, had

come in person, I was told, to inquire about its progress; but she was absent from his funeral, which was attended by but a scanty concourse of mourners. Half a dozen old Florentine sojourners, in spite of the prolonged estrangement which had preceded his death, had felt the kindly impulse to honour his grave. Among them was my friend Mrs. Coventry, whom I found, on my departure, waiting in her carriage at the gate of the cemetery.

“Well,” she said, relieving at last with a significant smile the solemnity of our immediate greeting, “and the great Madonna? Have you seen her, after all?”

“I have seen her,” I said; “she is mine—by bequest. But I shall never show her to you.”

“And why not, pray?”

“My dear Mrs. Coventry, you would not understand her!”

“Upon my word, you are polite.”

“Excuse me; I am sad and vexed and bitter.” And with reprehensible rudeness, I marched away. I was excessively impatient to leave Florence; my friend’s dark spirit seemed diffused through all things. I had packed my trunk to start for Rome

that night, and meanwhile, to beguile my unrest, I aimlessly paced the streets. Chance led me at last to the church of San Lorenzo. Remembering poor Theobald's phrase about Michael Angelo—"He did his best at a venture"—I went in and turned my steps to the chapel of the tombs. Viewing in sadness the sadness of its immortal treasures, I fancied, while I stood there, that they needed no ampler commentary than these simple words. As I passed through the church again to leave it, a woman, turning away from one of the side-altars, met me face to face. The black shawl depending from her head draped picturesquely the handsome visage of Madonna Serafina. She stopped as she recognised me, and I saw that she wished to speak. Her eye was bright, and her ample bosom heaved in a way that seemed to portend a certain sharpness of reproach. But the expression of my own face, apparently, drew the sting from her resentment, and she addressed me in a tone in which bitterness was tempered by a sort of dogged resignation. "I know it was you, now, that separated us," she said. "It was a pity he ever brought you to see me! Of course, you couldn't think of me as he

did. Well, the Lord gave him, the Lord has taken him. I have just paid for a nine days' mass for his soul. And I can tell you this, signore—I never deceived him. Who put it into his head that I was made to live on holy thoughts and fine phrases? It was his own fancy, and it pleased him to think so.—Did he suffer much?" she added more softly, after a pause.

"His sufferings were great, but they were short."

"And did he speak of me?" She had hesitated and dropped her eyes; she raised them with her question, and revealed in their sombre stillness a gleam of feminine confidence which, for the moment, revived and illumined her beauty. Poor Theobald! Whatever name he had given his passion, it was still her fine eyes that had charmed him.

"Be contented, madam," I answered, gravely.

She dropped her eyes again and was silent. Then exhaling a full, rich sigh, as she gathered her shawl together—"He was a magnificent genius!"

I bowed, and we separated.

Passing through a narrow side-street on my way back to my hotel, I perceived above a doorway a sign which it seemed to me I had read before. I

suddenly remembered that it was identical with the superscription of a card that I had carried for an hour in my waistcoat-pocket. On the threshold stood the ingenious artist whose claims to public favour were thus distinctly signalised, smoking a pipe in the evening air, and giving the finishing polish with a bit of rag to one of his inimitable "combinations." I caught the expressive curl of a couple of tails. He recognised me, removed his little red cap with a most obsequious bow, and motioned me to enter his studio. I returned his salute and passed on, vexed with the apparition. For a week afterwards, whenever I was seized among the ruins of triumphant Rome with some peculiarly poignant memory of Theobald's transcendent illusions and deplorable failure, I seemed to hear a fantastic, impertinent murmur, "Cats and monkeys, monkeys and cats; all human life is there!"

LONGSTAFF'S MARRIAGE.

FORTY years ago that traditional and anecdotal liberty of young American women which is notoriously the envy and despair of their foreign sisters, was not so firmly established as at the present hour ; yet it was sufficiently recognised to make it no scandal that so pretty a girl as Diana Belfield should start for the grand tour of Europe under no more imposing protection than that of her cousin and intimate friend, Miss Agatha Josling. She had, from the European point of view, beauty enough to make her enterprise perilous—the beauty foreshadowed in her name, which might have been given in prevision of her tall, light figure, her nobly poised head weighted with a coronal of auburn braids, her frank quick glance, and her rapid gliding step. She used often to walk about with a big dog, who had the

habit of bounding at her side and tossing his head against her outstretched hand ; and she had, moreover, a trick of carrying her long parasol, always folded, for she was not afraid of the sunshine, across her shoulder, in the fashion of a soldier's musket on a march. Thus equipped, she looked wonderfully like that charming antique statue of the goddess of the chase which we encounter in various replicas in half the museums of the world. You half expected to see a sandal-shod foot peep out beneath her fluttering robe. It was with this tread of the wakeful huntress that she stepped upon the old sailing-vessel which was to bear her to foreign lands. Behind her, with a great many shawls and satchels, came her little kinswoman, with quite another *démarche*. Agatha Josling was not a beauty, but she was the most judicious and most devoted of companions. These two persons had been united by the death of Diana's mother, when the latter young lady took possession of her patrimony. The first use she made of her inheritance was to divide it with Agatha, who had not a penny of her own ; the next was to purchase a letter of credit upon a European banker. The cousins had contracted a classical friendship—they

had determined to be all in all to each other, like the Ladies of Llangollen. Only, though their friendship was exclusive, their Llangollen was to be comprehensive. They would tread the pavements of historic cities and wander through the aisles of Gothic cathedrals, wind on tinkling mules through mountain gorges and sit among dark-eyed peasants on the shores of blue lakes. It may seem singular that a beautiful girl with a pretty fortune should have been left to seek the supreme satisfaction of life in friendship tempered by sight-seeing ; but Diana herself considered this pastime no beggarly alternative. Though she never told it herself, her biographer may do so ; she had had, in vulgar parlance, a hundred offers. To say that she had declined them is to say too little ; they had filled her with contempt. They had come from honourable and amiable men, and it was not her suitors in themselves that she contemned ; it was simply the idea of marrying. She found it insupportable ; a fact which completes her analogy with the mythic divinity to whom I have likened her. She was passionately single, fiercely virginal ; and in the straight-glancing grey eye which provoked men to admire, there was a certain silvery ray which

forbade them to hope. The fabled Diana took a fancy to a beautiful shepherd, but the real one had not yet found, sleeping or waking, her Endymion.

Thanks to this defensive eyebeam, the dangerous side of our heroine's enterprise was slow to define itself; thanks, too, to the exquisite propriety of her companion. Agatha Josling had an almost Quakerish purity and dignity; a bristling dragon could not have been a better safeguard than this glossy, grey-breasted dove. Money, too, is a protection, and Diana had money enough to purchase privacy. She travelled largely, and saw all the churches and pictures, the castles and cottages, included in the list which had been drawn up by the two friends in evening talks, at home, between two wax candles. In the evening they used to read aloud to each other from *Corinne* and *Childe Harold*, and they kept a diary in common, at which they "collaborated," like French playwrights, and which was studded with quotations from the authors I have mentioned. This lasted a year, at the end of which they found themselves a trifle weary. A snug posting-carriage was a delightful habitation, but looking at miles of pictures was very fatiguing to the back. Buying

souvenirs and trinkets under foreign arcades was a most absorbing occupation ; but inns were dreadfully apt to be draughty, and bottles of hot water, for application to the feet, had a disagreeable way of growing lukewarm. For these and other reasons our heroines determined to take a winter's rest, and for this purpose they betook themselves to the charming town of Nice, which was then but in the infancy of its fame. It was simply one of the hundred hamlets of the Riviera—a place where the blue waves broke on an almost empty strand and the olive-trees sprouted at the doors of the inns. In those days Nice was Italian, and the “Promenade des Anglais” existed only in an embryonic form. Exist, however, it did, practically, and British invalids, in moderate numbers, might have been seen taking the January sunshine beneath London umbrellas before the many-twinkling sea. Our young Americans quietly took their place in this harmless society. They drove along the coast, through the strange, dark, huddled fishing-villages, and they rode on donkeys among the bosky hills. They painted in water-colours and hired a piano ; they subscribed to the circulating library, and took lessons in the language of Silvio

Pellico from an old lady with very fine eyes, who wore an enormous brooch of cracked malachite, and gave herself out as the widow of a Roman exile.

They used to go and sit by the sea, each provided with a volume from the circulating library ; but they never did much with their books. The sunshine made the page too dazzling, and the people who strolled up and down before them were more entertaining than the ladies and gentlemen in the novels. They looked at them constantly from under their umbrellas ; they learned to know them all by sight. Many of their fellow-visitors were invalids—mild, slow-moving consumptives. But for the fact that women enjoy the exercise of pity, I should have said that these pale promenaders were a saddening spectacle. In several of them, however, our friends took a personal interest ; they watched them from day to day ; they noticed their changing colour ; they had their ideas about who was getting better and who was getting worse. They did little, however, in the way of making acquaintances—partly because pulmonary sufferers are no great talkers, and partly because this was also Diana's disposition. She said to her friend that they had not come to Europe to

pay morning-calls ; they had left their best bonnets and card-cases behind them. At the bottom of her reserve was the apprehension that she should be "admired ;" which was not fatuity, but simply an induction from an embarrassing experience. She had seen in Europe, for the first time, certain horrid men—polished adventurers with offensive looks and mercenary thoughts ; and she had a wholesome fear that one of these gentlemen might approach her through some accidental breach in her reserve. Agatha Josling, who had neither in reminiscence nor in prospect, the same reasons for turning her graceful back, would have been glad to extend the circle of their acquaintance, and would even have consented to put on her best bonnet for the purpose. But she had to content herself with an occasional murmur of small-talk, on a bench before the sea, with two or three English ladies of the botanising class ; jovial little spinsters who wore stout boots, gauntlets, and "uglies," and in pursuit of wayside flowers scrambled into places where the first-mentioned articles were uncompromisingly visible. For the rest, Agatha contented herself with spinning suppositions about the people she never spoke to.

She framed a great deal of hypothetic gossip, invented theories and explanations—generally of the most charitable quality. Her companion took no part in these harmless devisings, except to listen to them with an indolent smile. She seldom honoured her fellow-mortals with finding apologies for them, and if they wished her to read their history they must write it out in the largest letters.

There was one person at Nice upon whose biography, if it had been laid before her in this fashion, she probably would have bestowed a certain amount of attention. Agatha had noticed the gentleman first; or Agatha, at least, had first spoken of him. He was young and he looked interesting; Agatha had indulged in a good deal of wondering as to whether or no he belonged to the invalid category. She preferred to believe that one of his lungs was "affected;" it certainly made him more interesting. He used to stroll about by himself and sit for a long time in the sun, with a book peeping out of his pocket. This book he never opened; he was always staring at the sea. I say always, but my phrase demands an immediate modification; he looked at the sea whenever he was not looking at Diana

Belfield. He was tall and fair, slight, and, as Agatha Josling said, aristocratic-looking. He dressed with a certain careless elegance which Agatha deemed picturesque ; she declared one day that he reminded her of a love-sick prince. She learned eventually from one of the botanising spinsters that he was not a prince, that he was simply an English gentleman, Mr. Reginald Longstaff. There remained the possibility that he was love-sick ; but this point could not be so easily settled. Agatha's informant had assured her, however, that if they were not princes, the Longstaffs, who came from a part of the country in which she had visited, and owned great estates there, had a pedigree which many princes might envy. It was one of the oldest and the best of English names ; they were one of the innumerable untitled country families who held their heads as high as the highest. This poor Mr. Longstaff was a beautiful specimen of a young English gentleman ; he looked so gentle, yet so brave ; so modest, yet so cultivated ! The ladies spoke of him habitually as "poor" Mr. Longstaff, for they now took for granted that there was something the matter with him. At last Agatha Josling discovered what it was and made a solemn

proclamation of the same. The matter with poor Mr. Longstaff was simply that he was in love with Diana! It was certainly natural to suppose he was in love with some one, and, as Agatha said, it could not possibly be with herself. Mr. Longstaff was pale and slightly dishevelled; he never spoke to any one; he was evidently pre-occupied, and his mild, candid face was a sufficient proof that the weight on his heart was not a bad conscience. What could it be, then, but an unrequited passion? It was, however, equally pertinent to inquire why Mr. Longstaff took no steps to bring about a requital.

“Why in the world does he not ask to be introduced to you?” Agatha Josling demanded of her companion.

Diana replied, quite without eagerness, that it was plainly because he had nothing to say to her; and she declared with a trifle more emphasis, that she was incapable of proposing to him a topic of conversation. She added that she thought they had gossiped enough about the poor man, and that if by any chance he should have the bad taste to speak to them, she would certainly go away and leave him alone with Miss Josling. It is true, however, that at an

earlier period, she had let fall the remark that he was quite the most "distinguished" person at Nice ; and afterwards, though she was never the first to allude to him, she had more than once let her companion pursue the theme for some time without reminding her of its futility. The one person to whom Mr. Longstaff was observed to speak was an elderly man of foreign aspect who approached him occasionally in the most deferential manner, and whom Agatha Josling supposed to be his servant. This individual was apparently an Italian ; he had an obsequious attitude, a pair of grizzled whiskers, an insinuating smile. He seemed to come to Mr. Longstaff for orders ; presently he went away to execute them, and Agatha noticed that on retiring he always managed to pass in front of her companion, on whom he fixed his respectful but penetrating gaze. "He knows the secret," she always said, with gentle jocoseness ; "he knows what is the matter with his master and he wants to see whether he approves of you. Old servants never want their masters to marry, and I think this worthy man is rather afraid of you. At any rate, the way he stares at you tells the whole story."

“Every one stares at me!” said Diana, wearily.
“A cat may look at a king.”

As the weeks went by, Agatha Josling quite made up her mind that Mr. Longstaff's complaint was pulmonary. The poor young man's invalid character was now quite apparent ; he could hardly hold up his head or drag one foot after the other ; his servant was always near him to give him an arm or to hand him an extra overcoat. No one indeed knew with certainty that he was consumptive ; but Agatha agreed with the lady who had given the information about his pedigree, that this fact was in itself extremely suspicious ; for, as the little Englishwoman forcibly remarked, unless he were ill, why should he make such a mystery of it ? Consumption declaring itself in a young man of family and fortune was particularly sad ; such people often had diplomatic reasons for pretending to enjoy excellent health. It kept the legacy-hunters, and the hungry next-of-kin from worrying them to death. Agatha observed that this poor gentleman's last hours seemed likely to be only too lonely. She felt very much like offering to nurse him ; for, being no relation, he could not accuse her of mercenary motives. From time to time he got

up from the bench where he habitually sat, and strolled slowly past the two friends. Every time that he came near them Agatha had a singular feeling—a conviction that now he was really going to speak to them. He would speak with the gravest courtesy—she could not fancy him speaking otherwise. He began, at a distance, by fixing his grave, soft eyes on Diana, and as he advanced you would have said that he was coming straight up to her with some tremulous compliment. But as he drew nearer, his intentness seemed to falter; he strolled more slowly, he looked away at the sea, and he passed in front of her without having the courage to let his eyes rest upon her. Then he passed back again in the same fashion, sank down upon his bench, fatigued apparently by his aimless stroll, and fell into a melancholy reverie. To enumerate these accidents is to attribute to his behaviour a certain aggressiveness which it was far from possessing; there was something scrupulous and subdued in his manner which made it perfectly discreet, and it may be affirmed that not a single idler on the sunny shore suspected his speechless “attentions.”

“I wonder why it doesn't annoy us more that he

should look at us so much," said Agatha Josling, one day.

"That who should look at us?" asked Diana, not at all affectedly.

Agatha fixed her eyes for a moment on her friend, and then said gently—

"Mr. Longstaff. Now, don't say, 'Who is Mr. Longstaff?'" she added.

"I have yet to learn, really," said Diana, "that the person you appear to mean does look at us. I have never caught him in the act."

"That is because whenever you turn your eyes towards him he looks away. He is afraid to meet them. But I see him."

These words were exchanged one day as the two friends sat as usual before the twinkling sea; and, beyond them, as usual, lounged Reginald Longstaff. Diana bent her head faintly forward and glanced towards him. He was looking full at her and their eyes met, apparently for the first time. Diana dropped her own upon her book again, and then, after a silence of some moments, "It does annoy me," she said. Presently she added that she would go home and write a letter, and, though she had

never taken a step in Europe without having Agatha by her side, Miss Josling now allowed her to depart unattended. "You won't mind going alone?" Agatha had asked. "It is but three minutes, you know."

Diana replied that she preferred to go alone, and she moved away, with her parasol over her shoulder.

Agatha Josling had a particular reason for this variation from their maidenly custom. She felt a sudden conviction that if she were left alone, Mr. Longstaff would come and speak to her and say something very important, and she accommodated herself to this conviction without the sense of doing anything immodest. There was something solemn about it; it was a sort of presentiment; but it did not frighten her; it only made her feel very kind and appreciative. It is true that when at the end of ten minutes (they had seemed rather long), she saw the young man rise from his seat and slowly come towards her, she was conscious of a certain trepidation. Mr. Longstaff drew near; at last, he was close to her; he stopped and stood looking at her. She had averted her head, so as not to appear to expect him; but now she looked round again, and he very gravely lifted his hat.

“May I take the liberty of sitting down?” he asked.

Agatha bowed in silence, and, to make room for him, moved a certain blue shawl of Diana's, which was lying on the bench. He slowly sank into the place and then said very gently—

“I have ventured to speak to you, because I have something particular to say.” His voice trembled and he was extremely pale. His eyes, which Agatha thought very handsome, had a remarkable expression.

“I am afraid you are ill,” she said, with great kindness. “I have often noticed you and pitied you.”

“I thought you did, a little,” the young man answered. “That is why I made up my mind to speak to you.”

“You are getting worse,” said Agatha, softly.

“Yes, I am getting worse; I am dying. I am perfectly conscious of it; I have no illusions. I am weaker every day; I shall last but a few weeks.” This was said very simply; sadly, but not lugubriously.

But Agatha felt almost awe-stricken; there stirred

in her heart a delicate sense of sisterhood with this beautiful young man who sat there and talked so submissively of death.

“Can nothing be done?” she said.

He shook his head and smiled a little. “Nothing but to try and get what pleasure I can from this little remnant of life.”

Though he smiled she felt that he was very serious; that he was, indeed, deeply agitated, and trying to master his emotion.

“I am afraid you get very little pleasure,” Agatha rejoined. “You seem entirely alone.”

“I am entirely alone. I have no family—no near relations. I am absolutely alone.”

Agatha rested her eyes on him compassionately, and then—

“You ought to have spoken to *us*,” she said.

He sat looking at her; he had taken off his hat; he was slowly passing his hand over his forehead.

“You see I do—at last!”

“You wanted to before?”

“Very often.”

“I thought so!” said Agatha, with a candour which was in itself a dignity.

“But I couldn't,” said Mr. Longstaff. “I never saw you alone.”

Before she knew it Agatha was blushing a little ; for, to the ear, simply, his words implied that it was to her only he would have addressed himself for the pleasure he had coveted. But the next instant she had become conscious that what he meant was simply that he admired her companion so much that he was afraid of her, and that, daring to speak to herself, he thought her a much less formidable and less interesting personage. Her blush immediately faded ; for there was no resentment to keep the colour in her cheek ; and there was no resentment still when she perceived that, though her neighbour was looking straight at her, with his inspired, expanded eyes, he was thinking too much of Diana to have noticed this little play of confusion.

“Yes, it's very true,” she said. “It is the first time my friend has left me.”

“She is very beautiful,” said Mr. Longstaff.

“Very beautiful — and as good as she is beautiful.”

“Yes, yes,” he rejoined, solemnly. “I am sure of that. I *know* it!”

“I know it even better than you,” said Agatha, smiling a little.

“Then you will have all the more patience with what I want to say to you. It is very strange; it will make you think, at first, that I am perhaps out of my mind. But I am not; I am thoroughly reasonable. You will see.” Then he paused a moment; his voice had begun to tremble again.

“I know what you are going to say,” said Agatha, very gently. “You are in love with my friend.”

Mr. Longstaff gave her a look of devoted gratitude; he lifted up the edge of the blue shawl, which he had often seen Diana wear, and pressed it to his lips.

“I am extremely grateful!” he exclaimed. “You don’t think me crazy, then?”

“If you are crazy, there have been a great many madmen!” said Agatha.

“Of course there have been a great many. I have said that to myself, and it has helped me. They have gained nothing but the pleasure of their love, and I therefore, in gaining nothing and having nothing, am not worse off than the rest. But they had more than I, didn’t they? You see I have had

absolutely nothing—not even a glance,” he went on. “I have never even seen her look at me. I have not only never spoken to her, but I have never been near enough to speak to her. This is all I have ever had—to lay my hand on something she has worn ; and yet for the past month I have thought of her night and day. Sitting over there, a hundred rods away, simply because she was sitting in this place, in the same sunshine, looking out on the same sea : that was happiness enough for me. I am dying, but for the last five weeks that has kept me alive. It was for that I got up every day and came out here ; but for that, I should have stayed at home and never have got up again. I have never sought to be presented to her, because I didn't wish to trouble her for nothing. It seemed to me it would be an impertinence to tell her of my admiration. I have nothing to offer her—I am but the shadow of a living man, and if I were to say to her, ‘Madam, I love you,’ she could only answer, ‘Well, sir, what then?’ Nothing—nothing ! To speak to her of what I felt seemed only to open the lid of a grave in her face. It was more delicate not to do that ; so I kept my distance and said nothing. Even this, as I say, has been a happiness,

but it has been a happiness that has tired me out. This is the last of it. I must give up and make an end!" And he stopped, panting a little, and apparently exhausted with his eloquence.

Agatha had always heard of love at first sight; she had read of it in poems and romances, but she had never been so near to it as this. It seemed to her wonderfully beautiful, and she believed in it devoutly. It made Mr. Longstaff brilliantly interesting; it cast a glory over the details of his face and person and the pleading inflections of his voice. The little English ladies had been right; he was certainly a perfect gentleman. She could trust him.

"Perhaps if you stay at home a while you will get better," she said, soothingly.

Her tone seemed to him such an indication that she accepted the propriety and naturalness of his passion that he put out his hand, and for an instant laid it on her own.

"I knew you were reasonable—I knew I could talk to you. But I shall not get well. All the great doctors say so, and I believe them. If the passionate desire to get well for a particular purpose could work a miracle and cure a mortal disease, I should have

seen the miracle two months ago. To get well and have a right to speak to your friend—that was my passionate desire. But I am worse than ever; I am very weak, and I shall not be able to come out any more. It seemed to me to-day that I should never see you again, and yet I wanted so much to be able to tell you this! It made me very unhappy. What a wonderful chance it is that she went away! I must be grateful; if Heaven doesn't grant my great prayers it grants my small ones. I beg you to render me this service. Tell her what I have told you. Not now—not till I am gone. Don't trouble her with it while I am in life. Please promise me that. But when I am dead it will seem less importunate, because then you can speak of me in the past. It will be like a story. My servant will come and tell you. Then please say to her—'You were his last thought, and it was his last wish that you should know it.'"

He slowly got up and put out his hand; his servant, who had been standing at a distance, came forward with obsequious solemnity, as if it were part of his duty to adapt his deportment to the tone of his master's conversation. Agatha Josling took the young man's hand, and he stood and looked at her a

moment longer. She too had risen to her feet ; she was much impressed.

“ You won't tell her until *after* —— ? ” he said pleadingly. She shook her head. “ And then you will tell her, faithfully ? ” She nodded, he pressed her hand, and then, having raised his hat, he took his servant's arm, and slowly moved away.

Agatha kept her word ; she said nothing to Diana about her interview. The young Americans came out and sat upon the shore the next day, and the next, and the next, and Agatha watched intently for Mr. Longstaff's re-appearance. But she watched in vain ; day after day he was absent, and his absence confirmed his sad prediction. She thought all this a wonderful thing to happen to a woman, and as she glanced askance at her beautiful companion, she was almost irritated at seeing her sit there so careless and serene, while a poor young man was dying, as one might say, of love for her. At moments she wondered whether, in spite of her promise, it were not her Christian duty to tell Diana his story, and give her the chance to go to him. But it occurred to Agatha, who knew very well that her companion had a certain stately pride in which she herself was

deficient, that even if she were told of his condition Diana might decline to do anything ; and this she felt to be a very painful thing to see. Besides, she had promised, and she always kept her promises. But her thoughts were constantly with Mr. Longstaff and the romance of the affair. This made her melancholy, and she talked much less than usual. Suddenly she was aroused from a reverie by hearing Diana express a careless curiosity as to what had become of the solitary young man who used to sit on the neighbouring bench and do them the honour to stare at them.

For almost the first time in her life, Agatha Josling deliberately dissembled.

“He has either gone away, or he has taken to his bed. I am sure he is dying, alone, in some wretched mercenary lodging.”

“I prefer to believe something more cheerful,” said Diana. “I believe he is gone to Paris and is eating a beautiful dinner at a great restaurant.

Agatha for a moment said nothing ; and then—

“I don't think you care what becomes of him,” she ventured to observe.

“My dear child, why should I care?” Diana demanded.

And Agatha Josling was forced to admit that there really was no particular reason. But the event contradicted her. Three days afterwards she took a long drive with her friend, from which they returned only as dusk was closing in. As they descended from the carriage at the door of their lodging she observed a figure standing in the street, slightly apart, which even in the early darkness had an air of familiarity. A second glance assured her that Mr. Longstaff's servant was hovering there in the hope of catching her attention. She immediately determined to give him a liberal measure of it. Diana left the vehicle and passed into the house, while the coachman fortunately asked for orders for the morrow. Agatha briefly gave such as were necessary, and then, before going in, turned to the hovering figure. It approached on tiptoe, hat in hand, and shaking its head very sadly. The old man wore an air of animated affliction which indicated that Mr. Longstaff was a generous master, and he proceeded to address Miss Josling in that macaronic French which is usually at

the command of Italian domestics who have seen the world.

“I stole away from my dear gentleman’s bedside on purpose to have ten words with you. The old woman at the fruit-stall opposite told me that you had gone to drive, so I waited ; but it seemed to me a thousand years till you returned !”

“But you have not left your master alone ?” said Agatha.

“He has two Sisters of Charity—heaven reward them ! They watch with him night and day. He is very low, *pauvre cher homme !*” And the old man looked at the little lady with that clear, human, sympathetic glance with which Italians of all classes bridge over the social gulf. Agatha felt that he knew his master’s secret, and that she might discuss it with him freely.

“Is he dying ?” she asked.

“That’s the question, dear lady ! He is very low. The doctors have given him up ; but the doctors don’t know his malady. They have felt his dear body all over, they have sounded his lungs, and looked at his tongue and counted his pulse ; they know what he eats and drinks—it’s soon told ! But

they haven't seen his *mind*, dear lady. I have ; and so far I am a better doctor than they. I know his secret—I know that he loves the beautiful girl above!" and the old man pointed to the upper windows of the house.

"Has your master taken you into his confidence?" Agatha demanded.

He hesitated a moment ; then shaking his head a little and laying his hand on his heart—

"Ah, dear lady," he said, "the point is whether I have taken him into mine. I have not, I confess ; he is too far gone. But I have determined to be his doctor and to try a remedy the others have never thought of. Will you help me?"

"If I can," said Agatha. "What is your remedy?"

The old man pointed to the upper windows of the house again.

"Your lovely friend ! Bring her to his bedside."

"If he is dying," said Agatha, "how would that help him?"

"He is dying for want of it. That's my idea at least, and I think it's worth trying. If a young man loves a beautiful woman, and, having never so much

as touched the tip of her glove, falls into a mortal illness and wastes away, it requires no great wit to see that his illness doesn't come from his having indulged himself too grossly. It comes rather from the opposite cause! If he sinks when she's away, perhaps he will come up when she's there. At any rate, that's my theory; and any theory is good that will save a dying man. Let the young lady come and stand a moment by his bed, and lay her hand upon his. We shall see what happens. If he gets well, it's worth while; if he doesn't, there is no harm done. A young lady risks nothing in going to see a poor gentleman who lies in a stupor between two holy women."

Agatha was much impressed with this picturesque reasoning, but she answered that it was quite impossible that her beautiful friend should go upon this pious errand without a special invitation from Mr. Longstaff. Even should he beg Diana to come to him, Agatha was by no means sure her companion would go; but it was very certain she would not take such an extraordinary step at the mere suggestion of a servant.

"But you, dear lady, have the happiness not to

be a servant," the old man rejoined. "Let the suggestion be yours."

"From me it could come with no force, for what am I supposed to know about your poor master?"

"You have not told your friend what my dear master told you the other day?"

Agatha answered this question by another question.

"Did he tell you what he had told me?"

The old man tapped his forehead an instant and smiled.

"A good servant, you know, dear lady, needs never to be told things! If you have not repeated my master's words to the signorina, I beg you very earnestly to do so. I am afraid she is rather cold."

Agatha glanced a moment at the upper windows, and then she gave a silent nod. She wondered greatly to find herself discussing Diana's character with this aged menial; but the situation was so strange and romantic that one's old landmarks of propriety were quite obliterated, and it seemed natural that an Italian *valet de chambre* should be as frank and familiar as a servant in an old-fashioned comedy.

"If it is necessary that my dear master shall send

for the young lady," Mr. Longstaff's domestic resumed, "I think I can promise you that he will. Let me urge you, meanwhile, to talk to her. If she is cold, warm her up! Prepare her to find him very interesting. If you could see him, poor gentleman, lying there as still and handsome as if he were his own monument in a *campo santo*, I think he would interest you."

This seemed to Agatha a very touching image, but it occurred to her that her interview with Mr. Longstaff's representative, now unduly prolonged, was assuming a nocturnal character. She abruptly brought it to a close, after having assured her interlocutor that she would reflect upon what he had told her; and she rejoined her companion in the deepest agitation. Late that evening her agitation broke out. She went into Diana's room, where she found this young lady standing white-robed before her mirror, with her auburn tresses rippling down to her knees; and then, taking her two hands, she told the story of the young Englishman's passion, told of his coming to talk to her that day that Diana had left her alone on the bench by the sea, and of his venerable valet having, a couple of hours before,

sought speech of her on the same subject. Diana listened, at first with a rosy flush, and then with a cold, an almost cruel, frown.

“Take pity upon him,” said Agatha Josling—
“take pity upon him and go and see him.”

“I don't understand,” said her companion, “and it seems to me very disagreeable. What is Mr. Longstaff to me?” But before they separated, Agatha had persuaded her to say that if a message really should come from the young man's death-bed, she would not refuse him the light of her presence.

The message really came, brought of course by the invalid's zealous chamberlain. He re-appeared on the morrow, announcing that his master humbly begged for the honour of ten minutes' conversation with the two ladies. They consented to follow him, and he led the way to Mr. Longstaff's apartments. Diana still wore her irritated brow, but it made her look more than ever like the easily-startled goddess of the chase. Under the old man's guidance they passed through a low green door in a yellow wall, across a tangled garden full of orange-trees and winter roses, and into a white-wainscoted saloon, where they were presently left alone before a great

classic Empire clock, perched upon a frigid southern chimney-place. They waited, however, but a few moments ; the door of an adjoining room opened, and the Sisters of Charity, in white-winged hoods and with their hands thrust into the loose sleeves of the opposite arm, came forth and stood with downcast eyes on either side of the threshold. Then the old servant appeared between them, and beckoned to the two young girls to advance. The latter complied with a certain hesitation, and he led them into the chamber of the dying man. Here, pointing to the bed, he silently left them and withdrew ; not closing, however, the door of communication of the saloon, where he took up his station with the Sisters of Charity.

Diana and her companion stood together in the middle of the darker room, waiting for an invitation to approach their summoner. He lay in his bed, propped up on pillows, with his arms outside the counterpane. For a moment he simply gazed at them ; he was as white as the sheet that covered him, and he certainly looked like a dying man. But he had the strength to bend forward and to speak in a soft, distinct voice.

“Would you be so kind as to come nearer?” said Mr. Longstaff.

Agatha Josling gently pushed her friend forward, but she followed her to the bedside. Diana stood there, her frown had melted away; and the young man sank back upon his pillows and looked at her. A faint colour came into his face, and he clasped his two hands together on his breast. For some moments he simply gazed at the beautiful girl before him. It was an awkward situation for her, and Agatha expected her at any moment to turn away in disgust. But, slowly, her look of proud compulsion, of mechanical compliance, was exchanged for something more patient and pitying. The young Englishman's face expressed a kind of spiritual ecstasy which, it was impossible not to feel, gave a peculiar sanctity to the occasion.

“It was very generous of you to come,” he said at last. “I hardly ventured to hope you would. I suppose you know—I suppose your friend, who listened to me so kindly, has told you?”

“Yes, she knows,” murmured Agatha — “she knows.”

“I did not intend you should know until after my

death," he went on; "but"—and he paused a moment and shook his clasped hands together—"I couldn't wait! And when I felt that I couldn't wait, a new idea, a new desire, came into my mind." He was silent again for an instant, still looking with worshipful entreaty at Diana. The colour in his face deepened. "It is something that you may do for me. You will think it a most extraordinary request; but, in my position, a man grows bold. Dear lady, will you marry me?"

"Oh, dear!" cried Agatha Josling, just audibly. Her companion said nothing—her attitude seemed to say that in this remarkable situation one thing was no more surprising than another. But she paid Mr. Longstaff's proposal the respect of slowly seating herself in a chair which had been placed near his bed; here she rested in maidenly majesty, with her eyes fixed on the ground.

"It will help me to die happy, since die I must!" the young man continued. "It will enable me to do something for you—the only thing I can do. I have property—lands, houses, a great many beautiful things—things I have loved and am very sorry to be leaving behind me. Lying here help-

less and hopeless through so many days, the thought has come to me of what a bliss it would be to know that they should rest in your hands. If you were my wife, they would rest there safely. You might be spared much annoyance; and it is not only that. It is a fancy I have beyond that. It would be the feeling of it! I am fond of life. I don't want to die; but since I must die, it would be a happiness to have got just this out of life—this joining of our hands before a priest. You could go away then. For you it would make no change—it would be no burden. But I should have a few hours in which to lie and think of my happiness.”

There was something in the young man's tone so simple and sincere, so tender and urgent, that Agatha Josling was touched to tears. She turned away to hide them, and went on tiptoe to the window, where she silently let them flow. Diana apparently was not unmoved. She raised her eyes and let them rest kindly on those of Mr. Longstaff, who continued softly to urge his proposal. “It would be a great charity,” he said, “a great condescension; and it can produce no consequence

to you that you could regret. It can only give you a larger liberty. You know very little about me, but I have a feeling that, so far as belief goes, you can believe me, and that is all I ask of you. I don't ask you to love me—that takes time. It is something I can't pretend to. It is only to consent to the form, the ceremony. I have seen the English clergyman; he says he will perform it. He will tell you, besides, all about me—that I am an English gentleman, and that the name I offer you is one of the best in the world."

It was strange to hear a dying man lie there and argue his point so reasonably and consistently; but now, apparently, his argument was finished. There was a deep silence, and Agatha thought it would be discreet on her own part to retire. She moved quietly into the adjoining room, where the two Sisters of Charity still stood with their hands in their sleeves, and the old Italian valet was taking snuff with a melancholy gesture, like a baffled diplomatist. Agatha turned her back to these people, and, approaching a window again, stood looking out into the garden upon the orange-trees

and the winter roses. It seemed to her that she had been listening to the most beautiful, most romantic, and most eloquent of declarations. How could Diana be insensible to it? She earnestly hoped her companion would consent to the solemn and interesting ceremony proposed by Mr. Longstaff, and though her delicacy had prompted her to withdraw, it permitted her to listen eagerly to what Diana should say. Then (as she heard nothing) it was eclipsed by the desire to go back and whisper, with a sympathetic kiss, a word of counsel. She glanced round again at the Sisters of Charity, who appeared to have perceived that the moment was a critical one. One of them detached herself, and, as Agatha returned, followed her a few steps into the room. Diana had got up from her chair. She was looking about her uneasily—she grasped at Agatha's hand. Reginald Longstaff lay there with his wasted face and his brilliant eyes, looking at them both. Agatha took her friend's two hands in both her own.

“It is very little to do, dearest,” she murmured, “and it will make him very happy.”

The young man appeared to have heard her, and he repeated her words in a tone of intense entreaty.

“It is very little to do, dearest!”

Diana looked round at him an instant. Then, for an instant, she covered her face with her two hands. Removing them, but holding them still against her cheeks, she looked at her companion with eyes that Agatha always remembered—eyes through which a thin gleam of mockery flashed from the seriousness of her face.

“Suppose, after all, he should not die?” she murmured.

Longstaff heard it; he gave a long, soft moan, and turned away. The Sister immediately approached his bed, on the other side, dropped on her knees and bent over him, while he leaned his head against the great white cape upon which her crucifix was displayed. Diana stood a moment longer, looking at him; then, gathering her shawl together with a great dignity, she slowly walked out of the room. Agatha could do nothing but follow her. The old Italian, holding the door open for them to pass out, made them an exaggerated obeisance.

In the garden Diana paused, with a flush in her cheek, and said—

“If he could die with it, he could die without it!” But beyond the garden gate, in the empty sunny street, she suddenly burst into tears.

Agatha made no reproaches, no comments; but her companion, during the rest of the day, spoke of Mr. Longstaff several times with an almost passionate indignation. She pronounced his conduct indelicate, egotistic, impertinent; she declared that the scene had been revolting. Agatha, for the moment, remained silent, but the next day she attempted to make some vague apology for the poor young man. Then Diana, with passionate emphasis, begged her to be so good as never to mention his name again; and she added that this disgusting incident had put her completely out of humour with Nice, from which place they would immediately take their departure. This they did without delay; they began to travel again. Agatha heard no more of Reginald Longstaff; the English ladies who had been her original source of information with regard to him had now left Nice; otherwise she would have written to them for news. That is, she would have thought

of writing to them; I suspect that, on the whole, she would have denied herself this satisfaction, on the ground of loyalty to her friend. Agatha, at any rate, could only drop a tear, at solitary hours, upon the young man's, unanswered prayer and early death. It must be confessed, however, that sometimes, as the weeks elapsed, a certain faint displeasure mingled itself with her sympathy—a wish that, roughly speaking, poor Mr. Longstaff had left them alone. Since that strange interview at his bedside things had not gone well; the charm of their earlier wanderings seemed broken. Agatha said to herself that, really, if she were superstitious, she might fancy that Diana's conduct on this occasion had brought them under an evil spell. It was no superstition, certainly, to think that this young lady had lost a certain generous mildness of temper. She was impatient, absent-minded, indifferent, capricious. She expressed unaccountable opinions and proposed unnatural plans. It is true that disagreeable things were constantly happening to them—things which would have taxed the most unruffled spirit. Their post-horses broke down, their postilions were impertinent, their luggage went astray, their servants

betrayed them. The heavens themselves seemed to join in the conspiracy, and for days together were dark and ungenerous, treating them only to wailing winds and watery clouds. It was, in a large measure, in the light of after years that Agatha judged this period; but even at the time she felt it to be depressing, uncomfortable, unnatural. Diana apparently shared her opinion of it, though she never openly avowed it. She took refuge in a kind of haughty silence, and whenever a new disaster came to her knowledge, she simply greeted it with a bitter smile—a smile which Agatha always interpreted as an ironical reflection on poor fantastic, obtrusive Mr. Longstaff, who, through some mysterious action upon the machinery of nature, had turned the tide of their fortunes. At the end of the summer, suddenly, Diana proposed they should go home, speaking of it in the tone of a person who gives up a hopeless struggle. Agatha assented, and the two ladies returned to America, much to the relief of Miss Josling, who had an uncomfortable sense that there was something unexpressed and unregulated between them, which gave their intercourse a resemblance to a sultry morning. But

at home they separated very tenderly, for Agatha had to go into the country and devote herself to her nearer kinsfolk. These good people, after her long absence, were exacting, so that for two years she saw nothing of her late companion.

She often, however, heard from her, and Diana figured in the town-talk that was occasionally wafted to her rural home. She sometimes figured strangely—as a rattling coquette who carried on flirtations by the hundred and broke hearts by the dozen. This had not been Diana's former character, and Agatha found matter for meditation in the change. But the young lady's own letters said little of her admirers and displayed no trophies. They came very fitfully—sometimes at the rate of a dozen a month and sometimes not at all; but they were usually of a serious and abstract cast and contained the author's opinions upon life, death, religion, immortality. Mistress of her actions and of a pretty fortune, it might have been expected that news would come in trustworthy form of Diana's having at last accepted one of her rumoured lovers. Such news in fact came, and it was apparently trustworthy, inasmuch as it proceeded from the young

lady herself. She wrote to Agatha that she was to be married, and Agatha immediately congratulated her upon her happiness. Then Diana wrote back that though she was to be married she was not at all happy; and she shortly afterwards added that she was neither happy nor to be married. She had broken off her projected union and her felicity was smaller than ever. Poor Agatha was sorely perplexed, and she found it a comfort that a month after this her friend should have sent her a peremptory summons to come to her. She immediately obeyed.

Arriving, after a long journey, at the dwelling of her young hostess, she saw Diana at the further end of the drawing-room, with her back turned, looking out of the window. She was evidently watching for Agatha, but Miss Josling had come in, by accident, through a private entrance which was not visible from the window. She gently approached her friend and then Diana turned. She had her two hands laid upon her cheeks, and her eyes were sad; her face and attitude suggested something that Agatha had seen before and kept the memory of. While she kissed her Agatha

remembered that it was just so she had stood for that last moment before poor Mr. Longstaff.

“Will you come abroad with me again?” Diana asked. “I am very ill.”

“Dearest, what is the matter?” said Agatha.

“I don't know ; I believe I am dying. They tell me this place is bad for me ; that I must have another climate ; that I must move about. Will you take care of me ? I shall be very easy to take care of now.”

Agatha, for all answer, embraced her afresh, and as soon after this as possible the two friends embarked again for Europe. Miss Josling had thrown herself the more freely into this scheme, as her companion's appearance seemed a striking confirmation of her words. Not, indeed, that she looked as if she were dying ; but in the two years that had elapsed since their separation she had wasted and faded. She looked more than two years older, and the brilliancy of her beauty was dimmed. She was pale and languid, and she moved more slowly than when she seemed a goddess treading the forest leaves. The beautiful statue had grown human and taken on some of the imperfections of humanity. And yet the doctors

by no means affirmed that she had a mortal malady, and when one of them was asked by an inquisitive matron why he had recommended this young lady to cross the seas, he replied with a smile that it was a principle in his system to prescribe the remedies that his patients greatly desired.

At present the fair travellers had no misadventures. The broken charm had renewed itself; the heavens smiled upon them, and their postilions treated them like princesses. Diana, too, had completely recovered her native serenity; she was the gentlest, the most docile, the most reasonable of women. She was silent and subdued, as was natural in an invalid; though in one important particular her demeanour was certainly at variance with the idea of debility. She had much more taste for motion than for rest, and constant change of place became the law of her days. She wished to see all the places that she had not seen before, and all the old ones over again.

“If I am really dying,” she said, smiling softly, “I must leave my farewell cards everywhere.” So she passed her days in a great open carriage, leaning back in it and looking, right and left, at everything she passed. On her former journey to Europe she had

seen but little of England, and now she determined to visit the whole of this famous island. She rolled for weeks through the beautiful English landscape, past meadows and hedgerows, over the avenues of great estates and under the walls of castles and abbeys. For the English parks and manors, the "Halls" and "Courts," she had an especial admiration, and into the grounds of such as were open to appreciative tourists she made a point of penetrating. Here she stayed her carriage beneath the oaks and beeches, and sat for an hour at a time listening to nightingales and watching browsing deer. She never failed to visit a residence that lay on her road, and as soon as she arrived at a town she inquired punctiliously whether there were any fine country-seats in the neighbourhood. In this delightful fashion she spent a whole summer. Through the autumn she continued to wander restlessly; she visited, on the Continent, a hundred watering-places, and travellers' resorts. The beginning of the winter found her in Rome, where she confessed to being very tired and prepared to seek repose.

"I am weary, weary," she said to her companion.
"I didn't know how weary I was. I feel like

sinking down in this City of Rest, and resting here for ever."

She took a lodging in an old palace, where her chamber was hung with ancient tapestries, and her drawing-room decorated with the arms of a pope. Here, giving way to her fatigue, she ceased to wander. The only thing she did was to go every day to St. Peter's. She went nowhere else. She sat at her window all day with a big book in her lap, which she never read, looking out into a Roman garden at a fountain plashing into a weedy alcove, and half a dozen nymphs in mottled marble. Sometimes she told her companion that she was happier this way than she had ever been—in this way, and in going to St. Peter's. In the great church she often spent the whole afternoon. She had a servant behind her, carrying a stool; he placed her stool against a marble pilaster, and she sat there for a long time, looking up into the airy hollow of the dome and over the vast, peopled pavement. She noticed every one who passed her; but Agatha, lingering beside her, felt less at liberty, she hardly knew why, to make remarks about the people around them than she had felt when they sat upon the shore at Nice.

One day Agatha left her and strolled about the church by herself. The ecclesiastical life of Rome had not shrunken to its present smallness, and in one corner or another of St. Peter's there was always some occasion of worship. Agatha found plenty of entertainment, and was absent for half an hour. When she came back she found her companion's place deserted, and she sat down on the empty stool to await her re-appearance. Some time elapsed, and then she wandered away in quest of her. She found her at last, near one of the side-altars ; but she was not alone. A gentleman stood before her whom she appeared just to have encountered. Her face was very pale, and its expression led Agatha to look straightway at the stranger. Then she saw he was no stranger ; he was Reginald Longstaff ! He, too, evidently had been much startled, but he was already recovering himself. He stood very gravely an instant longer ; then he silently bowed to the two ladies and turned away.

Agatha felt at first as if she had seen a ghost ; but the impression was immediately corrected by the fact that Mr. Longstaff's aspect was very much less ghostly than it had been in life. He looked like a

strong man ; he held himself upright, and had a handsome colour. What Agatha saw in Diana's face was not surprise ; it was a pale radiance which she waited a moment to give a name to. Diana put out her hand and laid it in her arm, and her touch helped Agatha to know what it was that her face expressed. Then she felt too that this knowledge itself was not a surprise ; she seemed to have been waiting for it. She looked at her friend again, and Diana was beautiful. Diana blushed and became more beautiful yet. Agatha led her back to her seat near the marble pilaster.

“ So you were right,” Agatha said presently. “ He would, after all, have got well ! ”

Diana would not sit down ; she motioned to her servant to bring away the stool, and continued to move towards the door. She said nothing until she stood without, in the great square, between the colonnades and fountains. Then she spoke.

“ I am right now, but I was wrong then. He got well because I refused him. I gave him a hurt that cured him.”

That evening, beneath the Roman lamps in the great drawing-room of the arms of the pope, a remarkable conversation took place between the two

friends. Diana wept and hid her face ; but her tears and her shame were gratuitous. Agatha felt, as I have said, that she had already guessed all the unexplained, and it was needless for her companion to tell her that three weeks after she had refused Reginald Longstaff she insanely loved him. It was needless that Diana should confess that his image had never been out of her mind, that she believed he was still among the living, and that she had come back to Europe with a desperate hope of meeting him. It was in this hope that she had wandered from town to town and looked at every one who passed her ; and it was in this hope that she had lingered in so many English parks. She knew her love was very strange ; she could only say it had consumed her. It had all come upon her afterwards—in retrospect, in meditation. Or rather, she supposed, it had been there always, since she first saw him, and the revulsion from displeasure to pity, after she left his bedside, had brought it out. And with it came the faith that he had indeed got well, both of his malady and of his own passion. This was her punishment ! And then she spoke with a divine simplicity which Agatha, weeping a little too, wished that, if this belief of Diana's were true, the

young man might have heard. "I am so glad he is well and strong. And that he looks so handsome and so good!" And she presently added, "Of course he has got well only to hate me. He wishes never to see me again. Very good. I have had my wish; I have seen him once more. That was what I wanted, and I can die content."

It seemed in fact as if she were going to die. She went no more to St. Peter's, and exposed herself to no more encounters with Mr. Longstaff. She sat at her window and looked out at the freckled dryads and the cypresses, or wandered about her quarter of the palace with a vaguely smiling resignation. Agatha watched her with a sadness that was less submissive. This too was something that she had heard of, that she had read of in poetry and fable, but that she had never supposed she should see—her companion was dying of love! Agatha thought of many things and made up her mind upon several. The first of these latter was to send for the doctor. This personage came, and Diana let him look at her through his spectacles and hold her white wrist. He announced that she was ill, and she smiled and said she knew it; and then he gave her a little phial of

gold-coloured fluid, which he bade her to drink. He recommended her to remain in Rome, as the climate exactly suited her complaint. Agatha's second desire was to see Mr. Longstaff, who had appealed to her, she reflected, in the day of his own tribulation, and whom she therefore had a right to approach at present. She found it impossible to believe, too, that the passion which led him to take that extraordinary step at Nice, was extinct; such passions as that never died. If he had made no further attempt to see Diana, it was because he believed that she was still as cold as when she turned away from his death-bed. It must be added, moreover, that Agatha felt a lawful curiosity to learn how from that death-bed he had risen again into blooming manhood. This last point there was no theory to explain.

Agatha went to St. Peter's, feeling sure that sooner or later she should encounter him there. At the end of a week she perceived him, and seeing her, he immediately came and spoke to her. As Diana had said, he was now extremely handsome, and he looked particularly good. He was a quiet, blooming, gallant young English gentleman. He seemed much

embarrassed, but his manner to Agatha expressed the highest consideration.

"You must think me a dreadful impostor," he said, very gravely. "But I *was* dying—or I believed I was."

"And by what miracle did you recover?"

He was silent a moment, and then he said—

"I suppose it was by the miracle of wounded pride!" She noticed that he asked nothing about Diana; and presently she felt that he knew she was thinking of this. "The strangest part of it," he added, "was, that when my strength came back to me, what had gone before had become as a simple dream. And what happened to me here the other day," he went on, "failed to make it a reality again!"

Agatha looked at him a moment in silence, and saw again that he was handsome and kind; and then dropping a sigh over the wonderful mystery of things, she turned sadly away. That evening, Diana said to her—

"I know that you have seen him!"

Agatha came to her and kissed her.

"And I am nothing to him now?"

"My own dearest—" murmured Agatha.

Diana had drunk the little phial of gold-coloured

liquid ; but after this, she ceased to wander about the palace ; she never left her room. The old doctor was with her constantly now, and he continued to say that the air of Rome was very good for her complaint. Agatha watched her in helpless sadness ; she saw her fading and sinking, and yet she was unable to comfort her. She tried once to comfort her by saying hard things about Mr. Longstaff, by pointing out that he had not been honourable ; rising herein to a sublime hypocrisy, for on that last occasion at St. Peter's the poor girl had felt that she herself admired him as much as ever—that the timid little flame which was kindled at Nice was beginning to shoot up again. Agatha saw nothing but his good looks and his kind manner.

“What did he want—what did he mean, after all ?” she pretended to murmur, leaning over Diana's sofa. “Why should he have been wounded at what you said ? It would have been part of the bargain that he should not get well. Did he mean to take an unfair advantage—to make you his wife under false pretences ? When you put your finger on the weak spot, why should he resent it ? No, it was not honourable.”

Diana smiled sadly ; she had no false shame now, and she spoke of this thing as if it concerned another person.

“He would have counted on my forgiving him !” she said. A little while after this, she began to sink more rapidly. Then she called her friend to her, and said simply, “Send for him !” And as Agatha looked perplexed and distressed, she added, “I know he is still in Rome.”

Agatha at first was at a loss where to find him, but among the benefits of the papal dispensation was the fact that the pontifical police could instantly help you to lay your hand upon any sojourner in the Eternal City. Mr. Longstaff had a passport in detention by the government, and this document formed a basis of instruction to the servant whom Agatha sent to interrogate the authorities. The servant came back with the news that he had seen the distinguished stranger, who would wait upon the ladies at the hour they proposed. When this hour came and Mr. Longstaff was announced, Diana said to her companion that she must remain with her. It was an afternoon in spring ; the high windows into the ancient garden were open, and the room was

adorned with great sheaves and stacks of the abundant Roman flowers. Diana sat in a deep arm-chair.

It was certainly a difficult position for Reginald Longstaff. He stopped on the threshold and looked a while at the woman to whom he had made his extraordinary offer ; then, pale and agitated, he advanced rapidly towards her. He was evidently shocked at the state in which he found her ; he took her hand, and, bending over it, raised it to his lips. She fixed her eyes on him a little, and she smiled a little.

“It is I who am dying, now,” she said. “And now I want to ask something of *you*—to ask what you asked of me.”

He stared, and a deep flush of colour came into his face ; he hesitated for an appreciable moment. Then lowering his head with a movement of assent he kissed her hand again.

“Come back to-morrow,” she said ; “that is all I ask of you.”

He looked at her again for a while in silence ; then he abruptly turned and left her. She sent for the English clergyman and told him that she was a

dying woman, and that she wished the marriage service to be read beside her couch. The clergyman, too, looked at her in much surprise; but he consented to humour so tenderly romantic a whim and made an appointment for the afternoon of the morrow. Diana was very tranquil. She sat motionless, with her hands clasped and her eyes closed. Agatha wandered about, arranging and re-arranging the flowers. On the morrow she encountered Mr. Longstaff in one of the outer rooms: he had come before his time. She made this objection to his being admitted; but he answered that he knew he was early and had come with intention; he wished to spend the intervening hour with his prospective bride. So he went in and sat down by her couch again, and Agatha, leaving them alone, never knew what passed between them. At the end of the hour the clergyman arrived, and read the marriage service to them, pronouncing the nuptial blessing, while Agatha stood by as witness. Mr. Longstaff went through all this with a solemn, inscrutable face, and Agatha, observing him, said to herself that one must at least do him the justice to admit that he was performing punctiliously what honour demanded.

When the clergyman had gone he asked Diana when he might see her again.

“Never!” she said, with her strange smile. And she added—“I shall not live long now.”

He kissed her face, but he was obliged to leave her. He gave Agatha an anxious look as if he wished to say something to her, but she preferred not to listen to him. After this Diana sank rapidly. The next day Reginald Longstaff came back and insisted upon seeing Agatha.

“Why should she die?” he asked. “I want her to live.”

“Have you forgiven her?” said Agatha.

“She saved me!” he cried.

Diana consented to see him once more; there were two doctors in attendance now, and they also had consented. He knelt down beside her bed and asked her to live. But she feebly shook her head.

“It would be wrong of me,” she said.

Later, when he came back once more, Agatha told him she was gone. He stood wondering, with tears in his eyes.

"I don't understand," he said. "Did she love me or not?"

"She loved you," said Agatha, "more than she believed you could now love her; and it seemed to her that, when she had had her moment of happiness, to leave you at liberty was the tenderest way she could show it!"

MADAME DE MAUVES.

I.

THE view from the terrace at Saint-Germain-en-Laye is immense and famous. Paris lies spread before you in dusky vastness, domed and fortified, glittering here and there through her light vapours, and girdled with her silver Seine. Behind you is a park of stately symmetry, and behind that a forest, where you may lounge through turfy avenues and light-checked glades, and quite forget that you are within half an hour of the boulevards. One afternoon, however, in mid-spring, some five years ago, a young man seated on the terrace had chosen not to forget this. His eyes were fixed in idle wistfulness on the mighty human hive before him. He was fond of rural things, and he had come to Saint-Germain a week

before to meet the spring half-way; but though he could boast of a six months' acquaintance with the great city, he never looked at it from his present standpoint without a feeling of painfully unsatisfied curiosity. There were moments when it seemed to him that not to be there just then was to miss some thrilling chapter of experience. And yet his winter's experience had been rather fruitless, and he had closed the book almost with a yawn. Though not in the least a cynic, he was what one may call a disappointed observer; and he never chose the right-hand road without beginning to suspect after an hour's wayfaring that the left would have been the interesting one. He now had a dozen minds to go to Paris for the evening, to dine at the Café Brébant and to repair afterwards to the Gymnase and listen to the latest exposition of the duties of the injured husband. He would probably have risen to execute this project, if he had not observed a little girl who, wandering along the terrace, had suddenly stopped short and begun to gaze at him with round-eyed frankness. For a moment he was simply amused, for the child's face denoted helpless wonderment; the next he was agreeably surprised. "Why, this is my

friend Maggie," he said; "I see you have not forgotten me."

Maggie, after a short parley, was induced to seal her remembrance with a kiss. Invited then to explain her appearance at Saint-Germain, she embarked on a recital in which the general, according to the infantine method, was so fatally sacrificed to the particular, that Longmore looked about him for a superior source of information. He found it in Maggie's mamma, who was seated with another lady at the opposite end of the terrace; so, taking the child by the hand, he led her back to her companions.

Maggie's mamma was a young American lady, as you would immediately have perceived, with a pretty and friendly face and an expensive spring toilet. She greeted Longmore with surprised cordiality, mentioned his name to her friend, and bade him bring a chair and sit with them. The other lady, who, though equally young and perhaps even prettier, was dressed more soberly, remained silent, stroking the hair of the little girl, whom she had drawn against her knee. She had never heard of Longmore, but she now perceived that her companion

had crossed the ocean with him, had met him afterwards in travelling, and (having left her husband in Wall Street) was indebted to him for various small services.

Maggie's mamma turned from time to time and smiled at her friend with an air of invitation; the latter smiled back, and continued gracefully to say nothing.

For ten minutes Longmore felt a revival of interest in his interlocutress; then (as riddles are more amusing than commonplaces) it gave way to curiosity about her friend. His eyes wandered; her volubility was less suggestive than the latter's silence.

The stranger was perhaps not obviously a beauty nor obviously an American; but she was essentially both, on a closer scrutiny. She was slight and fair, and, though naturally pale, she was delicately flushed, apparently with recent excitement. What chiefly struck Longmore in her face was the union of a pair of beautifully gentle, almost languid grey eyes, with a mouth peculiarly expressive and firm. Her forehead was a trifle more expansive than belongs to classic types, and her thick brown hair was dressed out of the fashion, which was just then very ugly.

Her throat and bust were slender, but all the more in harmony with certain rapid, charming movements of the head, which she had a way of throwing back every now and then, with an air of attention and a sidelong glance from her dove-like eyes. She seemed at once alert and indifferent, contemplative and restless; and Longmore very soon discovered that if she was not a brilliant beauty, she was at least an extremely interesting one. This very impression made him magnanimous. He perceived that he had interrupted a confidential conversation, and he judged it discreet to withdraw, having first learned from Maggie's mamma—Mrs. Draper—that she was to take the six-o'clock train back to Paris. He promised to meet her at the station.

He kept his appointment, and Mrs. Draper arrived betimes, accompanied by her friend. The latter, however, made her farewells at the door and drove away again, giving Longmore time only to raise his hat. "Who is she?" he asked with visible ardour, as he brought Mrs. Draper her tickets.

"Come and see me to-morrow at the Hôtel de l'Empire," she answered, "and I will tell you all about her." The force of this offer in making him punctual

at the Hôtel de l'Empire Longmore doubtless never exactly measured; and it was perhaps well that he did not, for he found his friend, who was on the point of leaving Paris, so distracted by procrastinating milliners and perjured lingères that she had no wits left for disinterested narrative. "You must find Saint-Germain dreadfully dull," she said, as he was going. "Why won't you come with me to London?"

"Introduce me to Madame de Mauves," he answered, "and Saint-Germain will satisfy me." All he had learned was the lady's name and residence.

"Ah! she, poor woman, will not make Saint-Germain cheerful for you. She's very unhappy."

Longmore's further inquiries were arrested by the arrival of a young lady with a bandbox; but he went away with the promise of a note of introduction, to be immediately despatched to him at Saint-Germain.

He waited a week, but the note never came; and he declared that it was not for Mrs. Draper to complain of her milliner's treachery. He lounged on the terrace and walked in the forest, studied suburban street life, and made a languid attempt to investigate the records of the court of the exiled Stuarts; but he spent most

of his time in wondering where Madame de Mauves lived, and whether she ever walked on the terrace. Sometimes, he finally discovered; for one afternoon towards dusk he perceived her leaning against the parapet, alone. In his momentary hesitation to approach her, it seemed to him that there was almost a shade of trepidation; but his curiosity was not diminished by the consciousness of this result of a quarter of an hour's acquaintance. She immediately recognised him, on his drawing near, with the manner of a person unaccustomed to encounter an embarrassing variety of faces. Her dress, her expression, were the same as before; her charm was there, like that of sweet music on a second hearing. She soon made conversation easy by asking him for news of Mrs. Draper. Longmore told her that he was daily expecting news, and, after a pause, mentioned the promised note of introduction.

“It seems less necessary now,” he said—“for me, at least. But for you—I should have liked you to know the flattering things Mrs. Draper would probably have said about me.”

“If it arrives at last,” she answered, “you must

come and see me and bring it. If it doesn't, you must come without it."

Then, as she continued to linger in spite of the thickening twilight, she explained that she was waiting for her husband, who was to arrive in the train from Paris, and who often passed along the terrace on his way home. Longmore well remembered that Mrs. Draper had pronounced her unhappy, and he found it convenient to suppose that this same husband made her so. Edified by his six months in Paris—"What else is possible," he asked himself, "for a sweet American girl who marries an unclean Frenchman?"

But this tender expectancy of her lord's return undermined his hypothesis, and it received a further check from the gentle eagerness with which she turned and greeted an approaching figure. Longmore beheld in the fading light a stoutish gentleman, on the fair side of forty, in a high light hat, whose countenance, indistinct against the sky, was adorned by a fantastically pointed moustache. M. de Mauves saluted his wife with punctilious gallantry, and having bowed to Longmore, asked her several questions

in French. Before taking his proffered arm to walk to their carriage, which was in waiting at the gate of the terrace, she introduced our hero as a friend of Mrs. Draper, and a fellow-countryman, whom she hoped to see at home. M. de Mauves responded briefly, but civilly, in very fair English, and led his wife away.

Longmore watched him as he went, twisting his picturesque moustache, with a feeling of irritation which he certainly would have been at a loss to account for. The only conceivable cause was the light which M. de Mauves's good English cast upon his own bad French. For reasons involved apparently in the very structure of his being, Longmore found himself unable to speak the language tolerably. He admired and enjoyed it, but the very genius of awkwardness controlled his phraseology. But he reflected with satisfaction that Madame de Mauves and he had a common idiom, and his vexation was effectually dispelled by his finding on his table that evening a letter from Mrs. Draper. It enclosed a short, formal missive to Madame de Mauves, but the epistle itself was copious and confidential. She

had deferred writing till she reached London, where for a week, of course, she had found other amusements.

“I think it is the sight of so many women here who don't look at all like her, that has reminded me by the law of contraries of my charming friend at Saint-Germain and my promise to introduce you to her,” she wrote. “I believe I told you that she was unhappy, and I wondered afterwards whether I had not been guilty of a breach of confidence. But you would have found it out for yourself, and besides, she told me no secrets. She declared she was the happiest creature in the world, and then, poor thing, she burst into tears, and I prayed to be delivered from such happiness. It's the miserable story of an American girl, born to be neither a slave nor a toy, marrying a profligate Frenchman, who believes that a woman must be one or the other. The silliest American woman is too good for the best foreigner, and the poorest of us have moral needs that the cleverest Frenchman is quite unable to appreciate. She was romantic and perverse—she thought Americans were vulgar. Matrimonial felicity perhaps *is*

vulgar ; but I think nowadays she wishes she were a little less elegant. M. de Mauves cared, of course, for nothing but her money, which he is spending royally on his *menus plaisirs*. I hope you appreciate the compliment I pay you when I recommend you to go and console an unhappy wife. I have never given a man such a proof of esteem, and if you were to disappoint me I should renounce the world. Prove to Madame de Mauves that an American friend may mingle admiration and respect better than a French husband. She avoids society and lives quite alone, seeing no one but a horrible French sister-in-law. Do let me hear that you have drawn some of the sadness from that desperate smile of hers. Make her smile with a good conscience."

These zealous admonitions left Longmore slightly disturbed. He found himself on the edge of a domestic tragedy from which he instinctively recoiled. To call upon Madame de Mauves with his present knowledge seemed a sort of fishing in troubled waters. He was a modest man, and yet he asked himself whether the effect of his attentions might not be to add to her discomfort. A flattering sense of unwonted opportu-

nity, however, made him, with the lapse of time, more confident—possibly more reckless. It seemed a very inspiring idea to draw the sadness from his fair countrywoman's smile, and at least he hoped to persuade her that there was such a thing as an agreeable American. He immediately called upon her.

II.

SHE had been placed for her education, fourteen years before, in a Parisian convent, by a widowed mamma who was fonder of Homburg and Nice than of letting out tucks in the frocks of a vigorously growing daughter. Here, besides various elegant accomplishments—the art of wearing a train, of composing a bouquet, of presenting a cup of tea—she acquired a certain turn of the imagination which might have passed for a sign of precocious worldliness. She dreamed of marrying a title—not for the pleasure of hearing herself called Madame la Vicomtesse (for which it seemed to her that she should never greatly care), but because she had a romantic belief that the best birth is the guarantee of an ideal delicacy of feeling. Romances are rarely constructed in such perfect good faith, and Euphemia's excuse was the primitive purity of her imagination. She was

essentially incorruptible, and she cherished this pernicious conceit as if it had been a dogma revealed by a white-winged angel. Even after experience had given her a hundred rude hints, she found it easier to believe in fables, when they had a certain nobleness of meaning, than in well-attested but sordid facts. She believed that a gentleman with a long pedigree must be of necessity a very fine fellow, and that the consciousness of a picturesque family tradition imparts an exquisite tone to the character. *Noblesse oblige*, she thought, as regards yourself, and insures, as regards your wife. She had never spoken to a nobleman in her life, and these convictions were but a matter of transcendent theory. They were the fruit, in part, of the perusal of various Ultramontane works of fiction—the only ones admitted to the convent library—in which the hero was always a Legitimist vicomte who fought duels by the dozen, but went twice a month to confession; and in part of the perfumed gossip of her companions, many of them *filles de haut lieu*, who in the convent garden, after Sundays at home, depicted their brothers and cousins as Prince Charmings and young Paladins. Euphemia listened and said nothing; she shrouded her visions of matri-

mony under a coronet in religious mystery. She was not of that type of young lady who is easily induced to declare that her husband must be six feet high and a little near-sighted, part his hair in the middle, and have amber lights in his beard. To her companions she seemed to have a very pallid fancy ; and even the fact that she was a sprig of the transatlantic democracy never sufficiently explained her apathy on social questions. She had a mental image of that son of the Crusaders who was to suffer her to adore him, but like many an artist who has produced a masterpiece of idealisation, she shrank from exposing it to public criticism. It was the portrait of a gentleman rather ugly than handsome, and rather poor than rich. But his ugliness was to be nobly expressive, and his poverty delicately proud.

Euphemia had a fortune of her own, which, at the proper time, after fixing on her in eloquent silence those fine eyes which were to soften the feudal severity of his visage, he was to accept with a world of stifled protestations. One condition alone she was to make—that his blood should be of the very finest strain. On this she would stake her happiness.

It so chanced that circumstances were to give convincing colour to this primitive logic.

Though little of a talker, Euphemia was an ardent listener, and there were moments when she fairly hung upon the lips of Mademoiselle Marie de Mauves. Her intimacy with this chosen schoolmate was, like most intimacies, based on their points of difference. Mademoiselle de Mauves was very positive, very shrewd, very ironical, very French—everything that Euphemia felt herself unpardonable in not being. During her Sundays *en ville* she had examined the world and judged it, and she imparted her impressions to our attentive heroine with an agreeable mixture of enthusiasm and scepticism. She was moreover a handsome and well-grown person, on whom Euphemia's ribbons and trinkets had a trick of looking better than on their slender proprietress. She had, finally, the supreme merit of being a rigorous example of the virtue of exalted birth, having, as she did, ancestors honourably mentioned by Joinville and Commines, and a stately grandmother with a hooked nose, who came up with her after the holidays from a veritable *castel* in Auvergne. It seemed to Euphemia that these attributes made

her friend more at home in the world than if she had been the daughter of even the most prosperous grocer. A certain aristocratic impudence Mademoiselle de Mauves abundantly possessed, and her raids among her friend's finery were quite in the spirit of her baronial ancestors in the twelfth century—a spirit which Euphemia considered but a large way of understanding friendship—a freedom from small deference to the world's opinions which would sooner or later justify itself in acts of surprising magnanimity. Mademoiselle de Mauves herself perhaps was but partially conscious of that sweet security which Euphemia envied her. She proved herself later in life such an accomplished schemer that her sense of having further heights to scale must have awakened early. Our heroine's ribbons and trinkets had much to do with the other's sisterly patronage, and her appealing pliancy of character even more; but the concluding motive of Marie's writing to her grandmamma to invite Euphemia for a three weeks' holiday to the *castel* in Auvergne involved altogether superior considerations. Mademoiselle de Mauves was indeed at this time seventeen years of age, and presumably capable of general

views; and Euphemia, who was hardly less, was a very well-grown subject for experiment, besides being pretty enough almost to pre-assure success. It is a proof of the sincerity of Euphemia's aspirations that the *castel* was not a shock to her faith. It was neither a cheerful nor a luxurious abode, but the young girl found it as delightful as a play. It had battered towers and an empty moat, a rusty draw-bridge and a court paved with crooked, grass-grown slabs, over which the antique coach-wheels of the old lady with the hooked nose seemed to awaken the echoes of the seventeenth century. Euphemia was not frightened out of her dream; she had the pleasure of seeing it assume the consistency of a flattering presentiment. She had a taste for old servants, old anecdotes, old furniture, faded household colours, and sweetly stale odours—musty treasures in which the Château de Mauves abounded. She made a dozen sketches in water-colours, after her conventual pattern; but sentimentally, as one may say, she was for ever sketching with a freer hand.

Old Madame de Mauves had nothing severe but her nose, and she seemed to Euphemia, as indeed she was, a graciously venerable relic of an historic

order of things. She took a great fancy to the young American, who was ready to sit all day at her feet and listen to anecdotes of the *bon temps* and quotations from the family chronicles. Madame de Mauves was a very honest old woman, and uttered her thoughts with antique plainness. One day, after pushing back Euphemia's shining locks and blinking at her with some tenderness from under her spectacles, she declared with an energetic shake of the head that she didn't know what to make of her. And in answer to the young girl's startled blush—"I should like to advise you," she said, "but you seem to me so all of a piece that I am afraid that if I advise you, I shall spoil you. It's easy to see that you are not one of us. I don't know whether you are better, but you seem to me to listen to the murmur of your own young spirit, rather than to the voice from behind the confessional or to the whisper of opportunity. Young girls, in my day, when they were stupid, were very docile, but when they were clever, were very sly. You are clever enough, I imagine, and yet if I guessed all your secrets at this moment, is there one I should have to frown at? I can tell you a wickeder one than

any you have discovered for yourself. If you expect to live in France, and you wish to be happy, don't listen too hard to that little voice I just spoke of—the voice that is neither the curé's nor the world's. You will fancy it saying things that it won't help your case to hear. They will make you sad, and when you are sad you will grow plain, and when you are plain you will grow bitter, and when you are bitter you will be very disagreeable. I was brought up to think that a woman's first duty is to please, and the happiest women I have known have been the ones who performed this duty faithfully. As you are not a Catholic, I suppose you can't be a *dévoté*; and if you don't take life as a fifty years' mass, the only way to take it is as a game of skill. Listen to this. Not to lose at the game of life, you must—I don't say cheat, but not be too sure your neighbour won't, and not be shocked out of your self-possession if he does. Don't lose, my dear; I beseech you, don't lose. Be neither suspicious nor credulous, and if you find your neighbour peeping, don't cry out, but very politely wait your own chance. I have had my *revanche* more than once in my day, but I really think that the

sweetest I could take against life as a whole would be to have your blessed innocence profit by my experience."

This was rather bewildering advice, but Euphemia understood it too little to be either edified or frightened. She sat listening to it very much as she would have listened to the speeches of an old lady in a comedy, whose diction should picturesquely correspond to the pattern of her mantilla and the fashion of her head-dress. Her indifference was doubly dangerous, for Madame de Mauves spoke at the prompting of coming events, and her words were the result of a somewhat troubled conscience—a conscience which told her at once that Euphemia was too tender a victim to be sacrificed to an ambition, and that the prosperity of her house was too precious a heritage to be sacrificed to a scruple. The prosperity in question had suffered repeated and grievous breaches, and the house of De Mauves had been pervaded by the cold comfort of an establishment in which people were obliged to balance dinner-table allusions to feudal ancestors against the absence of side-dishes; a state of things the more regrettable as the family was now mainly represented

by a gentleman whose appetite was large and who justly maintained that its historic glories had not been established by underfed heroes.

Three days after Euphemia's arrival, Richard de Mauves came down from Paris to pay his respects to his grandmother, and treated our heroine to her first encounter with a gentilhomme in the flesh. On coming in he kissed his grandmother's hand, with a smile which caused her to draw it away with dignity, and set Euphemia, who was standing by, wondering what had happened between them. Her unanswered wonder was but the beginning of a life of bitter perplexity, but the reader is free to know that the smile of M. de Mauves was a reply to a certain postscript affixed by the old lady to a letter promptly addressed to him by her granddaughter, after Euphemia had been admitted to justify the latter's promises. Mademoiselle de Mauves brought her letter to her grandmother for approval, but obtained no more than was expressed in a frigid nod. The old lady watched her with a sombre glance as she proceeded to seal the letter, and suddenly bade her open it again and bring her a pen.

"Your sister's flatteries are all nonsense," she

wrote ; “the young lady is far too good for you, *mauvais sujet*. If you have a particle of conscience you will not come and disturb the repose of an angel of innocence.”

The young girl, who had read these lines, made up a little face as she re-directed the letter ; but she laid down her pen with a confident nod which might have seemed to mean that, to the best of her belief, her brother had not a conscience.

“If your meant what you said,” the young man whispered to his grandmother on the first opportunity, “it would have been simpler not to let her send the letter !”

It was perhaps because she was wounded by this cynical insinuation that Madame de Mauves remained in her own apartment during a greater part of Euphemia’s stay, so that the latter’s angelic innocence was left entirely to the Baron’s mercy. It suffered no worse mischance, however, than to be prompted to intenser communion with itself. M. de Mauves was the hero of the young girl’s romance made real, and so completely accordant with this creature of her imagination, that she felt afraid of him, very much as she would have been of a

supernatural apparition. He was now thirty-five— young enough to suggest possibilities of ardent activity, and old enough to have formed opinions which a simple woman might deem it an intellectual privilege to listen to. He was perhaps a trifle handsomer than Euphemia's rather grim, Quixotic ideal, but a very few days reconciled her to his good looks, as effectually they would have reconciled her to his ugliness. He was quiet, grave, eminently distinguished. He spoke little, but his speeches, without being sententious, had a certain nobleness of tone which caused them to re-echo in the young girl's ears at the end of the day. He paid her very little direct attention, but his chance words—if he only asked her if she objected to his cigarette—were accompanied by a smile of extraordinary kindness.

It happened that shortly after his arrival, riding an unruly horse which Euphemia with shy admiration had watched him mount in the castle yard, he was thrown with a violence which, without disparaging his skill, made him for a fortnight an interesting invalid, lounging in the library with a bandaged knee. To beguile his confinement, Euphemia was repeatedly induced to sing to him, which she did with a little

natural tremor in her voice which might have passed for an exquisite refinement of art. He never overwhelmed her with compliments, but he listened with unwandering attention, remembered all her melodies, and sat humming them to himself. While his imprisonment lasted, indeed, he passed hours in her company, and made her feel not unlike some unfriended artist who has suddenly gained the opportunity to devote a fortnight to the study of a great model. Euphemia studied with noiseless diligence what she supposed to be the "character" of M. de Mauves, and the more she looked, the more fine lights and shades she seemed to behold in this masterpiece of nature. M. de Mauves's character, indeed, whether from a sense of being generously scrutinised, or for reasons which bid graceful defiance to analysis, had never been so amiable; it seemed really to reflect the purity of Euphemia's interpretation of it. There had been nothing especially to admire in the state of mind in which he left Paris—a hard determination to marry a young girl whose charms might or might not justify his sister's account of them, but who was mistress, at the worst, of a couple of hundred thousand francs a year.

He had not counted out sentiment ; if she pleased him, so much the better ; but he had left a meagre margin for it, and he would hardly have admitted that so excellent a match could be improved by it. He was a placid sceptic, and it was a singular fate for a man who believed in nothing to be so tenderly believed in. What his original faith had been he could hardly have told you ; for as he came back to his childhood's home to mend his fortunes by pretending to fall in love, he was a thoroughly perverted creature, and overlaid with more corruptions than a summer day's questioning of his conscience would have put to flight. Ten years' pursuit of pleasure, which a bureau full of unpaid bills was all he had to show for, had pretty well stifled the natural lad whose violent will and generous temper might have been shaped by other circumstances to a result which a romantic imagination might fairly accept as a late-blooming flower of hereditary honour. The Baron's violence had been subdued, and he had learned to be irreproachably polite ; but he had lost the fineness of his generosity, and his politeness, which in the long run society paid for, was hardly more than a form of luxurious egotism, like his fond-

ness for cambric handkerchiefs, lavender gloves, and other fopperies by which shopkeepers remained out of pocket. In after years he was terribly polite to his wife. He had formed himself, as the phrase was, and the form prescribed to him by the society into which his birth and his tastes introduced him was marked by some peculiar features. That which mainly concerns us is its classification of the fairer half of humanity as objects not essentially different—say from the light gloves one soils in an evening and throws away. To do M. de Mauves justice, he had in the course of time encountered such plentiful evidence of this pliant, glove-like quality in the feminine character, that idealism naturally seemed to him a losing game.

Euphemia, as he lay on his sofa, seemed by no means a refutation; she simply reminded him that very young women are generally innocent, and that this, on the whole, is the most charming stage of their development. Her innocence inspired him with profound respect, and it seemed to him that if he shortly became her husband it would be exposed to a danger the less. Old Madame de Mauves, who flattered herself that in this whole matter she

was very laudably rigid, might have learned a lesson from his gallant consideration. For a fortnight the Baron was almost a blushing boy again. He watched from behind the *Figaro*, and admired, and held his tongue. He was not in the least disposed towards a flirtation; he had no desire to trouble the waters he proposed to transfuse into the golden cup of matrimony. Sometimes a word, a look, a movement of Euphemia's, gave him the oddest sense of being, or of seeming at least, almost bashful; for she had a way of not dropping her eyes, according to the mysterious virginal mechanism—of not fluttering out of the room when she found him there alone, of treating him rather as a benignant than as a pernicious influence—a radiant frankness of demeanour, in fine, in spite of an evident natural reserve, which it seemed equally graceless not to make the subject of a compliment and indelicate not to take for granted. In this way there was wrought in the Baron's mind a vague, unwonted resonance of soft impressions, as we may call it, which indicated the transmutation of "sentiment" from a contingency into a fact. His imagination enjoyed it; he was very fond of music, and this

reminded him of some of the best he had ever heard. In spite of the bore of being laid up with a lame knee, he was in a better humour than he had known for months ; he lay smoking cigarettes and listening to the nightingales, with the comfortable smile of one of his country neighbours whose big ox should have taken the prize at a fair. Every now and then, with an impatient suspicion of the resemblance, he declared that he was pitifully *bête* ; but he was under a charm which braved even the supreme penalty of seeming ridiculous. One morning he had half an hour's *tête-à-tête* with his grandmother's confessor, a soft-voiced old Abbé, whom, for reasons of her own, Madame de Mauves had suddenly summoned, and had left waiting in the drawing-room while she rearranged her curls. His reverence, going up to the old lady, assured her that M. le Baron was in a most edifying state of mind, and a promising subject for the operation of grace. This was a theological interpretation of the Baron's momentary good-humour. He had always lazily wondered what priests were good for, and he now remembered, with a sense of especial

obligation to the Abbé, that they were excellent for marrying people.

A day or two after this he left off his bandages, and tried to walk. He made his way into the garden and hobbled successfully along one of the alleys; but in the midst of his progress he was seized with a spasm of pain which forced him to stop and call for help. In an instant Euphemia came tripping along the path and offered him her arm with the frankest solicitude.

“Not to the house,” he said, taking it; “further on, to the bosquet.” This choice was prompted by her having immediately confessed that she had seen him leave the house, had feared an accident, and had followed him on tiptoe.

“Why didn’t you join me?” he had asked, giving her a look in which admiration was no longer disguised, and yet felt itself half at the mercy of her replying that a *jeune fille* should not be seen following a gentleman. But it drew a breath which filled its lungs for a long time afterwards, when she replied simply that if she had overtaken him he might have accepted her arm out of politeness, whereas

she wished to have the pleasure of seeing him walk alone.

The bosquet was covered with an odorous tangle of blossoming creepers, and a nightingale overhead was shaking out love-notes with a profuseness which made the Baron consider his own conduct the perfection of propriety.

“In America,” he said, “I have always heard that when a man wishes to marry a young girl, he offers himself simply, face to face, without any ceremony—without parents, and uncles, and cousins sitting round in a circle.”

“Why, I believe so,” said Euphemia, staring, and too surprised to be alarmed.

“Very well, then,” said the Baron, “suppose our bosquet here to be America. I offer you my hand, à l’Américaine. It will make me intensely happy to see you accept it.”

Whether Euphemia’s acceptance was in the American manner is more than I can say; I incline to think that for fluttering, grateful, trustful, softly-amazed young hearts, there is only one manner all over the world.

That evening, in the little turret chamber which it

was her happiness to inhabit, she wrote a dutiful letter to her mamma, and had just sealed it when she was sent for by Madame de Mauves. She found this ancient lady seated in her boudoir, in a lavender satin gown, with all her candles lighted, as if to celebrate her grandson's betrothal. "Are you very happy?" Madame de Mauves demanded, making Euphemia sit down before her.

"I am almost afraid to say so," said the young girl, "lest I should wake myself up."

"May you never wake up, *belle enfant*," said the old lady, solemnly. "This is the first marriage ever made in our family in this way—by a Baron de Mauves proposing to a young girl in an arbour, like Jeannot and Jeannette. It has not been our way of doing things, and people may say it wants frankness. My grandson tells me he considers it the perfection of frankness. Very good. I am a very old woman, and if your differences should ever be as marked as your agreement, I should not like to see them. But I should be sorry to die and think you were going to be unhappy. You can't be, beyond a certain point; because, though in this world the Lord sometimes makes light of our expectations, He never altogether

ignores our deserts. But you are very young and innocent, and easy to deceive. There never was a man in the world—among the saints themselves—as good as you believe the Baron. But he's a *galant homme* and a gentleman, and I have been talking to him to-night. To you I want to say this—that you're to forget the worldly rubbish I talked the other day about frivolous women being happy. It's not the kind of happiness that would suit you. Whatever befalls you, promise me this: to be yourself. The Baronne de Mauves will be none the worse for it. Yourself, understand, in spite of everything—bad precepts and bad examples, bad usage, even. Be persistently and patiently yourself, and a De Mauves will do you justice!"

Euphemia remembered this speech in after years, and more than once, wearily closing her eyes, she seemed to see the old woman sitting upright in her faded finery and smiling grimly, like one of the Fates who sees the wheel of fortune turning up her favourite event. But at the moment it seemed to her simply to have the proper gravity of the occasion; this was the way, she supposed, in which lucky young girls

were addressed on their engagement by wise old women of quality.

At her convent, to which she immediately returned, she found a letter from her mother, which shocked her far more than the remarks of Madame de Mauves. Who were these people, Mrs. Cleve demanded, who had presumed to talk to her daughter of marriage without asking her leave? Questionable gentlefolk, plainly; the best French people never did such things. Euphemia would return straightway to her convent, shut herself up, and await her own arrival.

It took Mrs. Cleve three weeks to travel from Nice to Paris, and during this time the young girl had no communication with her lover beyond accepting a bouquet of violets, marked with his initials and left by a female friend. "I have not brought you up with such devoted care," she declared to her daughter at their first interview, "to marry a penniless Frenchman. I will take you straight home, and you will please to forget M. de Mauves."

Mrs. Cleve received that evening at her hotel a visit from the Baron which mitigated her wrath, but failed to modify her decision. He had very good manners, but she was sure he had horrible morals; and Mrs.

Cleve, who had been a very good-natured censor on her own account, felt a genuine spiritual need to sacrifice her daughter to propriety. She belonged to that large class of Americans who make light of their native land in familiar discourse, but are startled back into a sense of moral responsibility when they find Europeans taking them at their word. "I know the type, my dear," she said to her daughter with a sagacious nod. "He will not beat you; sometimes you will wish he would."

Euphemia remained solemnly silent; for the only answer she felt capable of making her mother was that her mind was too small a measure of things, and that the Baron's type was one which it took some mystical illumination to appreciate. A person who confounded him with the common throng of her watering-place acquaintance was not a person to argue with. It seemed to Euphemia that she had no cause to plead; her cause was in the Lord's hands and her lover's.

M. de Mauves had been irritated and mortified by Mrs. Cleve's opposition, and hardly knew how to handle an adversary who failed to perceive that a De Mauves of necessity gave more than he received. But

he had obtained information on his return to Paris which exalted the uses of humility. Euphemia's fortune, wonderful to say, was greater than its fame, and in view of such a prize, even a De Mauves could afford to take a snubbing.

The young man's tact, his deference, his urbane insistence, won a concession from Mrs. Cleve. The engagement was to be put off and her daughter was to return home, be brought out and receive the homage she was entitled to, and which would but too surely take a form dangerous to the Baron's suit. They were to exchange neither letters, nor mementos, nor messages; but if at the end of two years Euphemia had refused offers enough to attest the permanence of her attachment, he should receive an invitation to address her again.

This decision was promulgated in the presence of the parties interested. The Baron bore himself gallantly, and looked at the young girl, expecting some tender protestation. But she only looked at him silently in return, neither weeping, nor smiling, nor putting out her hand. On this they separated; but as the Baron walked away, he declared to himself that, in spite of the confounded two years, he was a

very happy fellow—to have a fiancée who, to several millions of francs, added such strangely beautiful eyes.

How many offers Euphemia refused but scantily concerns us—and how the Baron wore his two years away. He found that he needed pastimes, and, as pastimes were expensive, he added heavily to the list of debts to be cancelled by Euphemia's millions. Sometimes, in the thick of what he had once called pleasure with a keener conviction than now, he put to himself the case of their failing him after all ; and then he remembered that last mute assurance of her eyes, and drew a long breath of such confidence as he felt in nothing else in the world save his own punctuality in an affair of honour.

At last, one morning, he took the express to Havre with a letter of Mrs. Cleve's in his pocket, and ten days later made his bow to mother and daughter in New York. His stay was brief, and he was apparently unable to bring himself to view what Euphemia's uncle, Mr. Butterworth, who gave her away at the altar, called our great experiment in democratic self-government, in a serious light. He smiled at

everything, and seemed to regard the New World as a colossal *plaisanterie*. It is true that a perpetual smile was the most natural expression of countenance for a man about to marry Euphemia Cleve.

III.

LONGMORE'S first visit seemed to open to him so large an opportunity for tranquil enjoyment that he very soon paid a second, and, at the end of a fortnight, had spent a great many hours in the little drawing-room which Madame de Mauves rarely quitted except to drive or walk in the forest. She lived in an old-fashioned pavilion, between a high-walled court and an excessively artificial garden, beyond whose enclosure you saw a long line of tree-tops. Longmore liked the garden, and in the mild afternoons used to move his chair through the open window to the little terrace which overlooked it, while his hostess sat just within. After a while she came out and wandered through the narrow alleys and beside the thin-spouting fountain, and at last introduced him to a little gate in the garden-wall,

opening upon a lane which led to the forest. Hitherward, more than once, she wandered with him, bare-headed and meaning to go but twenty rods, but always strolling good-naturedly further, and often taking a generous walk. They discovered many things to talk about, and to the pleasure of finding the hours tread inaudibly away, Longmore was able to add the satisfaction of suspecting that he was a "resource" for Madame de Mauves. He had made her acquaintance with the sense, not altogether comfortable, that she was a woman with a painful secret, and that seeking her acquaintance would be like visiting at a house where there was an invalid who could bear no noise. But he very soon perceived that her sorrow, since sorrow it was, was not an aggressive one; that it was not fond of attitudes and ceremonies, and that her earnest wish was to forget it. He felt that even if Mrs. Draper had not told him she was unhappy, he would have guessed it; and yet he could hardly have pointed to his evidence. It was chiefly negative—she never alluded to her husband. Beyond this it seemed to him simply that her whole being was pitched on a lower key than harmonious Nature meant; she was like a powerful singer who had lost

her high notes. She never drooped nor sighed nor looked unutterable things ; she indulged in no dusky sarcasms against fate ; she had, in short, none of the coquetry of unhappiness. But Longmore was sure that her gentle gaiety was the result of strenuous effort, and that she was trying to interest herself in his thoughts to escape from her own. If she had wished to irritate his curiosity and lead him to take her confidence by storm, nothing could have served her purpose better than this ingenuous reserve. He declared to himself that there was a rare magnanimity in such ardent self-effacement, and that but one woman in ten thousand was capable of merging an intensely personal grief in thankless outward contemplation. Madame de Mauves, he instinctively felt, was not sweeping the horizon for a compensation or a consoler ; she had suffered a personal deception which had disgusted her with persons. She was not striving to balance her sorrow with some strongly seasoned joy ; for the present, she was trying to live with it, peaceably, reputably, and without scandal—turning the key on it occasionally, as you would on a companion liable to attacks of insanity. Longmore was a man of fine senses and of an active imagination,

whose leading-strings had never been slipped. He began to regard his hostess as a figure haunted by a shadow which was somehow her intenser, more authentic self. This hovering mystery came to have for him an extraordinary charm. Her delicate beauty acquired to his eye the serious cast of certain blank-browed Greek statues; and sometimes, when his imagination, more than his ear, detected a vague tremor in the tone in which she attempted to make a friendly question seemed to have behind it none of the hollow resonance of absent-mindedness, his marvelling eyes gave her an answer more eloquent, though much less to the point, than the one she demanded.

She gave him indeed much to wonder about, and, in his ignorance he formed a dozen experimental theories on the subject of her marriage. She had married for love and staked her whole soul on it; of that he was convinced. She had not married a Frenchman to be near Paris and her base of supplies of millinery; he was sure she had seen conjugal happiness in a light of which her present life, with its conveniences for shopping and its moral aridity, was the absolute negation. But by what extraordinary

process of the heart—through what mysterious intermission of that moral instinct which may keep pace with the heart, even when this organ is making unprecedented time—had she fixed her affections on an arrogantly frivolous Frenchman? Longmore needed no telling; he knew M. de Mauves was frivolous; it was stamped on his eyes, his nose, his mouth, his carriage. For Frenchwomen Longmore had but a scanty kindness, or at least (what with him was very much the same thing) but a scanty gallantry; they all seemed to belong to the type of a certain fine lady to whom he had ventured to present a letter of introduction, and whom, directly after his first visit to her, he had set down in his note-book as “metallic.” Why should Madame de Mauves have chosen a Frenchwoman’s lot—she whose character had a perfume which is absent from even the brightest metals? He asked her one day frankly if it had cost her nothing to transplant herself—if she were not oppressed with a sense of irreconcilable difference from “all these people.” She was silent a while, and he fancied that she was hesitating as to whether she should resent so unceremonious an allusion to her husband. He almost wished she would; it would

seem a proof that her deep reserve of sorrow had a limit.

“I almost grew up here,” she said at last, “and it was here for me that those dreams of the future took shape that we all have when we cease to be very young. As matters stand, one may be very American and yet arrange it with one’s conscience to live in Europe. My imagination perhaps—I had a little when I was younger—helped me to think I should find happiness here. And after all, for a woman, what does it signify? This is not America, perhaps, about me, but it’s quite as little France. France is out there, beyond the garden, in the town, in the forest; but here, close about me, in my room and”—she paused a moment—“in my mind, it’s a nameless country of my own. It’s not her country,” she added, “that makes a woman happy or unhappy.”

Madame Clairin, Euphemia’s sister-in-law, might have been supposed to have undertaken the graceful task of making Longmore ashamed of his uncivil jottings about her sex and nation. Mademoiselle de Mauves, bringing example to the confirmation of precept, had made a remunerative match and sacrificed her name to the millions of a prosperous and aspiring

wholesale druggist—a gentleman liberal enough to consider his fortune a moderate price for being towed into circles unpervaded by pharmaceutic odours. His system, possibly, was sound, but his own application of it was unfortunate. M. Clairin's head was turned by his good luck. Having secured an aristocratic wife, he adopted an aristocratic vice and began to gamble at the Bourse. In an evil hour he lost heavily, and then staked heavily to recover himself. But he overtook his loss only by a greater one. Then he let everything go—his wits, his courage, his probity—everything that had made him what his ridiculous marriage had so promptly unmade. He walked up the Rue Vivienne one day with his hands in his empty pockets, and stood for half an hour staring confusedly up and down the glittering Boulevard. People brushed against him, and half a dozen carriages almost ran over him, until at last a policeman, who had been watching him for some time, took him by the arm and led him gently away. He looked at the man's cocked hat and sword with tears in his eyes; he hoped he was going to interpret to him the wrath of Heaven—to execute the penalty of his dead-weight of self-abhorrence. But the *sergent de ville*

only stationed him in the embrasure of a door, out of harm's way, and walked away to supervise a financial contest between an old lady and a cabman. Poor M. Clairin had only been married a year, but he had had time to measure the lofty spirit of a De Mauves. When night had fallen, he repaired to the house of a friend and asked for a night's lodging; and as his friend, who was simply his old head book-keeper, and lived in a small way, was put to some trouble to accommodate him—"You must excuse me," Clairin said, "but I can't go home. I am afraid of my wife!" Towards morning he blew his brains out. His widow turned the remnants of his property to better account than could have been expected, and wore the very handsomest mourning. It was for this latter reason, perhaps, that she was obliged to retrench at other points, and accept a temporary home under her brother's roof.

Fortune had played Madame Clairin a terrible trick, but had found an adversary and not a victim. Though quite without beauty, she had always had what is called the grand air, and her air from this time forward was grander than ever. As she trailed about in her sable furbelows, tossing back her well-dressed

head, and holding up her vigilant eye-glass, she seemed to be sweeping the whole field of society and asking herself where she should pluck her revenge. Suddenly she espied it, ready made to her hand, in poor Longmore's wealth and amiability. American dollars and American complaisance had made her brother's fortune ; why should they not make hers ? She over-estimated Longmore's wealth and misinterpreted his amiability ; for she was sure that a man could not be so contented without being rich, nor so unassuming without being weak. He encountered her advances with a formal politeness which covered a great deal of unflattering discomposure. She made him feel acutely uncomfortable ; and though he was at a loss to conceive how he could be an object of interest to a shrewd Parisienne, he had an indefinable sense of being enclosed in a magnetic circle, like the victim of an incantation. If Madame Clairin could have fathomed his Puritanic soul, she would have laid by her wand and her book and admitted that he was an impossible subject. She gave him a kind of moral chill, and he never mentally alluded to her save as that dreadful woman—that terrible woman. He did justice to her grand air, but for his pleasure

he preferred the small air of Madame de Mauves ; and he never made her his bow, after standing frigidly passive for five minutes to one of her gracious overtures to intimacy, without feeling a peculiar desire to ramble away into the forest, fling himself down on the warm grass, and, staring up at the blue sky, forget that there were any women in nature who didn't please like the swaying tree-tops. One day, on his arrival, she met him in the court and told him that her sister-in-law was shut up with a headache, and that his visit must be for her. He followed her into the drawing-room with the best grace at his command, and sat twirling his hat for half an hour. Suddenly he understood her; the caressing cadence of her voice was a distinct invitation to solicit the incomparable honour of her hand. He blushed to the roots of his hair and jumped up with uncontrollable alacrity ; then, dropping a glance at Madame Clairin, who sat watching him with hard eyes over the edge of her smile, as it were, perceived on her brow a flash of unforgiving wrath. It was not becoming, but his eyes lingered a moment, for it seemed to illuminate her character. What he saw there frightened him and he felt himself murmuring, " Poor

Madame de Mauves!" His departure was abrupt, and this time he really went into the forest and lay down on the grass.

After this he admired Madame de Mauves more than ever; she seemed a brighter figure, with a darker shadow appended to it. At the end of a month he received a letter from a friend with whom he had arranged a tour through the Low Countries, reminding him of his promise to meet him promptly at Brussels. It was only after his answer was posted that he fully measured the zeal with which he had declared that the journey must either be deferred or abandoned—that he could not possibly leave Saint-Germain. He took a walk in the forest, and asked himself if this were irrevocably true. If it were, surely his duty was to march straight home and pack his trunk. Poor Webster, who, he knew, had counted ardently on this excursion, was an excellent fellow; six weeks ago he would have gone through fire and water to join Webster. It had never been in his books to throw overboard a friend whom he had loved for ten years for a married woman whom for six weeks he had—admired. It was certainly beyond question that he was lingering at Saint-Germain

because this admirable married woman was there ; but in the midst of all this admiration, what had become of prudence ? This was the conduct of a man drifting rapidly into passion. If she were as unhappy as he believed, the passion of such a man would help her very little more than his indifference ; if she were less so, she needed no help, and could dispense with his friendly offices. He was sure, moreover, that if she knew he was staying on her account she would be extremely annoyed. But this very feeling had much to do with making it hard to go ; her displeasure would only enhance the gentle stoicism which touched him to the heart. At moments, indeed, he assured himself that to linger was simply impertinent ; it was indelicate to make a daily study of such a shrinking grief. But inclination answered that some day her self-support would fail, and he had a vision of this admirable creature calling vainly for help. He would be her friend, to any length ; it was unworthy to both of them to think about consequences. But he was a friend who carried about with him a muttering resentment that he had not known her five years earlier, and a brooding hostility to those who had anticipated him. It seemed

one of fortune's most mocking strokes, that she should be surrounded by persons whose only merit was that they threw the charm of her character into radiant relief.

Longmore's growing irritation made it more and more difficult for him to see any other merit than this in the Baron de Mauves. And yet, disinterestedly, it would have been hard to give a name to the portentous vices which such an estimate implied, and there were times when our hero was almost persuaded against his finer judgment that he was really the most considerate of husbands, and that his wife liked melancholy for melancholy's sake. His manners were perfect, his urbanity was unbounded, and he seemed never to address her but, sentimentally speaking, hat in hand. His tone to Longmore (as the latter was perfectly aware) was that of a man of the world to a man not quite of the world; but what it lacked in deference it made up in easy friendliness. "I can't thank you enough for having overcome my wife's shyness," he more than once declared. "If we left her to do as she pleased, she would bury herself alive. Come often, and bring some one else. She

will have nothing to do with my friends, but perhaps she will look at yours."

The Baron made these speeches with a remorseless placidity very amazing to our hero, who had an innocent belief that a man's head may point out to him the shortcomings of his heart, and make him ashamed of them. He could not fancy him capable both of neglecting his wife and taking an almost humorous view of her suffering. Longmore had, at any rate, an exasperating sense that the Baron thought rather the less of his wife on account of that very same fine difference of nature which so deeply stirred his own sympathies. He was rarely present during Longmore's visits, and he made a daily journey to Paris, where he had "business," as he once mentioned—not in the least with a tone of apology. When he appeared, it was late in the evening, and with an imperturbable air of being on the best of terms with every one and every thing, which was peculiarly annoying if you happened to have a tacit quarrel with him. If he was a good fellow, he was surely a good fellow spoiled. Something he had, however, which Longmore vaguely envied—a kind of superb

positiveness—a manner rounded and polished by the traditions of centuries—an urbanity exercised for his own sake and not his neighbours’—which seemed the result of something better than a good conscience—of a vigorous and unscrupulous temperament. The Baron was plainly not a moral man, and poor Longmore, who was, would have been glad to learn the secret of his luxurious serenity. What was it that enabled him, without being a monster with visibly cloven feet, exhaling brimstone, to misprize so cruelly a lovely wife, and to walk about the world with a candid smile under his moustache? It was the essential grossness of his imagination, which had nevertheless helped him to turn so many neat compliments. He could be very polite, and he could doubtless be supremely impertinent; but he was as unable to draw a moral inference of the finer strain as a school-boy who has been playing truant for a week to solve a problem in algebra. It was ten to one he did not know his wife was unhappy; he and his brilliant sister had doubtless agreed to consider their companion a Puritanical little person, of meagre aspirations and slender accomplishments, contented

with looking at Paris from the terrace, and, as an especial treat, having a countryman very much like herself to supply her with homely transatlantic gossip. M. de Mauves was tired of his companion ; he relished a higher flavour in female society. She was too modest, too simple, too delicate ; she had too few arts, too little coquetry, too much charity. M. de Mauves, some day, lighting a cigar, had probably decided she was stupid. It was the same sort of taste, Longmore moralised, as the taste for Gérôme in painting, and for M. Charles Baudelaire in literature. The Baron was a pagan and his wife was a Christian, and between them, accordingly, was a gulf. He was by race and instinct a *grand seigneur*. Longmore had often heard of this distinguished social type, and was properly grateful for an opportunity to examine it closely. It had certainly a picturesque boldness of outline, but it was fed from spiritual sources so remote from those of which he felt the living gush of his own soul, that he found himself gazing at it, in irreconcilable antipathy, across a dim historic mist. "I am a modern *bourgeois*," he said, "and not perhaps so good a judge of how far a pretty

woman's tongue may go at supper without prejudice to her reputation. But I have not met one of the sweetest of women without recognising her, and discovering that a certain sort of character offers better entertainment than Thérésa's songs, sung by a dissipated duchess. Wit for wit, I think mine carries me further." It was easy indeed to perceive that, as became a *grand seigneur*, M. de Mauves had a stock of social principles. He would not especially have desired, perhaps, that his wife should compete in amateur operettas with the duchesses in question, chiefly of recent origin; but he held that a gentleman may take his amusement where he finds it, that he is quite at liberty not to find it at home, and that the wife of a De Mauves who should hang her head and have red eyes, and allow herself to make any other response to officious condolence than that her husband's amusements were his own affair, would have forfeited every claim to having her finger-tips bowed over and kissed. And yet in spite of this definite faith, Longmore fancied that the Baron was more irritated than gratified by his wife's irreproachable reserve. Did it dimly occur to him that

it was self-control and not self-effacement? She was a model to all the inferior matrons of his line, past and to come, and an occasional "scene" from her at a convenient moment would have something reassuring—would attest her stupidity a trifle more forcibly than her inscrutable tranquillity.

Longmore would have given much to know the principle of her submissiveness, and he tried more than once, but with rather awkward timidity, to sound the mystery. She seemed to him to have been long resisting the force of cruel evidence, and, though she had succumbed to it at last, to have denied herself the right to complain, because if faith was gone, her heroic generosity remained. He believed even that she was capable of reproaching herself with having expected too much, and of trying to persuade herself out of her bitterness by saying that her hopes had been illusions and that this was simply—life. "I hate tragedy," she once said to him; "I have a really pusillanimous dread of moral suffering. I believe that—without base concessions—there is always some way of escaping from it. I would almost rather never smile all my life than have a

single violent explosion of grief." She lived evidently in nervous apprehension of being fatally convinced—of seeing to the end of her deception. Longmore, when he thought of this, felt an immense longing to offer her something of which she could be as sure as of the sun in heaven.

IV.

HIS friend Webster lost no time in accusing him of the basest infidelity, and asking him what he found at Saint-Germain to prefer to Van Eyck and Memling, Rubens and Rembrandt. A day or two after the receipt of Webster's letter, he took a walk with Madame de Mauves in the forest. They sat down on a fallen log, and she began to arrange into a bouquet the anemones and violets she had gathered. "I have a letter," he said at last, "from a friend whom I some time ago promised to join at Brussels. The time has come—it has passed. It finds me terribly unwilling to leave Saint-Germain."

She looked up with the candid interest which she always displayed in his affairs, but with no disposition, apparently, to make a personal application of his words. "Saint-Germain is pleasant enough," she

said ; “ but are you doing yourself justice ? Shall you not regret in future days that instead of travelling and seeing cities and monuments and museums and improving your mind, you sat here—for instance—on a log, pulling my flowers to pieces ? ”

“ What I shall regret in future days,” he answered after some hesitation, “ is that I should have sat here and not spoken the truth on the matter. I am fond of museums and monuments and of improving my mind, and I am particularly fond of my friend Webster. But I can’t bring myself to leave Saint-Germain without asking you a question. You must forgive me if it’s indiscreet, and be assured that curiosity was never more respectful. Are you really as unhappy as I imagine you to be ? ”

She had evidently not expected his question, and she greeted it with a startled blush. “ If I strike you as unhappy,” she said, “ I have been a poorer friend to you than I wished to be.”

“ I, perhaps, have been a better friend of yours than you have supposed. I have admired your reserve, your courage, your studied gaiety. But I have felt the existence of something beneath them that was more *you*—more you as I wished to know

you—than they were; something that I have believed to be a constant sorrow.”

She listened with great gravity, but without an air of offence, and he felt that while he had been timorously calculating the last consequences of friendship, she had serenely accepted them. “You surprise me,” she said slowly, and her blush still lingered. “But to refuse to answer you would confirm an impression on your part which is evidently already too strong. An unhappiness that one can sit comfortably talking about, is an unhappiness with distinct limitations. If I were examined before a board of commissioners for investigating the felicity of mankind, I am sure I should be pronounced a very fortunate woman.” There was something delightfully gentle to him in her tone, and its softness seemed to deepen as she continued. “But let me add, with all gratitude for your sympathy, that it’s my own affair altogether. It need not disturb you, Mr. Longmore, for I have often found myself in your company a very contented person.”

“You are a wonderful woman,” he said, “and I admire you as I never have admired any one. You are wiser than anything I, for one, can say to you;

and what I ask of you is not to let me advise or console you, but simply thank you for letting me know you." He had intended no such outburst as this, but his voice rang loud, and he felt a kind of unfamiliar joy as he uttered it.

She shook her head with some impatience. "Let us be friends—as I supposed we were going to be—without protestations and fine words. To have you paying compliments to my wisdom—that would be real wretchedness. I can dispense with your admiration better than the Flemish painters can—better than Van Eyck and Rubens, in spite of all their worshippers. Go join your friend—see everything, enjoy everything, learn everything, and write me an excellent letter, brimming over with your impressions. I am extremely fond of the Dutch painters," she added, with a slight faltering of the voice, which Longmore had noticed once before, and which he had interpreted as the sudden weariness of a spirit self-condemned to play a part.

"I don't believe you care a button about the Dutch painters," he said, with an unhesitating laugh. "But I shall certainly write you a letter."

She rose and turned homeward, thoughtfully

re-arranging her flowers as she walked. Little was said ; Longmore was asking himself, with a tremor in the unspoken words, whether all this meant simply that he was in love. He looked at the rooks wheeling against the golden-hued sky, between the tree-tops, but not at his companion, whose personal presence seemed lost in the felicity she had created. Madame de Mauves was silent and grave, because she was painfully disappointed. A sentimental friendship she had not desired ; her scheme had been to pass with Longmore as a placid creature with a good deal of leisure, which she was disposed to devote to profitable conversation of an impersonal sort. She liked him extremely, and felt that there was something in him to which, when she made up her girlish mind that a needy French baron was the ripest fruit of time, she had done very scanty justice. They went through the little gate in the garden wall and approached the house. On the terrace Madame Clairin was entertaining a friend—a little elderly gentleman with a white moustache, and an order in his button-hole. Madame de Mauves chose to pass round the house into the court ; whereupon her sister-in-law, greeting Longmore with a

commanding nod, lifted her eye-glass and stared at them as they went by. Longmore heard the little old gentleman uttering some old-fashioned epigram about "la vieille galanterie Française," and then, by a sudden impulse, he looked at Madame de Mauves and wondered what she was doing in such a world. She stopped before the house, without asking him to come in. "I hope you will act upon my advice," she said, "and waste no more time at Saint-Germain."

For an instant there rose to his lips some faded compliment about his time not being wasted, but it expired before the simple sincerity of her look. She stood there as gently serious as the angel of disinterestedness, and Longmore felt as if he should insult her by treating her words as a bait for flattery. "I shall start in a day or two," he answered, "but I will not promise you not to come back."

"I hope not," she said, simply. "I expect to be here a long time."

"I shall come and say good-bye," he rejoined; on which she nodded with a smile, and went in.

He turned away, and walked slowly homeward by the terrace. It seemed to him that to leave her thus, for a gain on which she herself insisted, was to know

her better and admire her more. But he was in a vague ferment of feeling which her evasion of his question half an hour before had done more to deepen than to allay. Suddenly, on the terrace, he encountered M. de Mauves, who was leaning against the parapet, finishing a cigar. The Baron, who, he fancied, had an air of peculiar affability, offered him his white plump hand. Longmore stopped; he felt a sudden angry desire to cry out to him that he had the loveliest wife in the world; that he ought to be ashamed of himself not to know it; and that for all his shrewdness he had never looked into the depths of her eyes. The Baron, we know, considered that he had; but there was something in Euphemia's eyes now that was not there five years before. They talked for a while about various things, and M. de Mauves gave a humorous account of his visit to America. His tone was not soothing to Longmore's excited sensibilities. He seemed to consider the country a gigantic joke, and his urbanity only went so far as to admit that it was not a bad one. Longmore was not, by habit, an aggressive apologist for his native institutions; but the Baron's narrative confirmed his worst impressions of French superficiality.

He had understood nothing, he had felt nothing, he had learned nothing ; and our hero, glancing askance at his aristocratic profile, declared that if the chief merit of a long pedigree was to leave one so fatuously stupid, he thanked his stars that the Longmores had emerged from obscurity in the present century, in the person of an enterprising timber-merchant. M. de Mauves dwelt of course on that prime oddity of ours—the liberty allowed to young girls ; and related the history of his researches into the “opportunities” it presented to French noble-men—researches in which, during a fortnight’s stay, he seemed to have spent many agreeable hours. “I am bound to admit,” he said, “that in every case I was disarmed by the extreme candour of the young lady, and that they took care of themselves to better purpose than I have seen some mammas in France take care of them.” Longmore greeted this handsome concession with the grimmest of smiles, and damned his impertinent patronage.

Mentioning at last that he was about to leave Saint-Germain, he was surprised, without exactly being flattered, by the Baron’s quickened attention. “I am so very sorry !” the latter cried. “I hoped

we had you for the whole summer." Longmore murmured something civil, and wondered why M. de Mauves should care whether he stayed or went. "You were a distraction to Madame de Mauves," the Baron added; "I assure you I mentally blessed your visits."

"They were a great pleasure to me," Longmore said, gravely. "Some day I expect to come back."

"Pray do;" and the Baron laid his hand urgently on his arm. "You see I have confidence in you." Longmore was silent for a moment, and the Baron puffed his cigar reflectively and watched the smoke. "Madame de Mauves," he said at last, "is a rather singular person."

Longmore shifted his position, and wondered whether he were going to "explain" Madame de Mauves.

"Being, as you are, her fellow-countryman," the Baron went on, "I don't mind speaking frankly. She's just a little morbid—the most charming woman in the world, as you see, but a little fanciful—a little *entêtée*. Now you see she has taken this extraordinary fancy for solitude. I can't get her to go anywhere—to see any one. When my friends present

themselves she is perfectly polite, but she is simply freezing. She doesn't do herself justice, and I expect every day to hear two or three of them say to me, 'Your wife is *jolie à croquer*: what a pity she hasn't a little *esprit*.' You must have found out that she has really a great deal. But to tell the whole truth, what she needs is to forget herself. She sits alone for hours poring over her English books and looking at life through that terrible brown fog which they always seem to me to fling over the world. I doubt if your English authors," the Baron continued, with a serenity which Longmore afterwards characterised as sublime, "are very sound reading for young married women. I don't pretend to know much about them; but I remember that, not long after our marriage, Madame de Mauves undertook to read me one day a certain Wordsworth—a poet highly esteemed, it appears, *chez vous*. It seemed to me that she took me by the nape of the neck and held my head for half an hour over a basin of *soupe aux choux*, and that one ought to ventilate the drawing-room before any one called. But I suppose you know him—*ce génie-là*. I think my wife never forgave me, and that it was a real shock to her to find

she had married a man who had very much the same taste in literature as in cookery. But you are a man of general culture—a man of the world,” said the Baron, turning to Longmore and fixing his eyes on the seal of his watchguard. “You can talk about everything, and I am sure you like Alfred de Musset as well as Monsieur Wordsworth. Talk to her about everything, Alfred de Musset included. Bah! I forgot that you are going. Come back then as soon as possible and talk about your travels. If Madame de Mauves too would make a little voyage, it would do her good. It would enlarge her horizon”—and M. de Mauves made a series of short nervous jerks with his stick in the air—“it would wake up her imagination. She’s too rigid, you know—it would show her that one may bend a trifle without breaking.” He paused a moment and gave two or three vigorous puffs. Then, turning to his companion again, with a little nod and a confidential smile—“I hope you admire my candour. I wouldn’t say all this to one of *us!*”

Evening was coming on, and the lingering light seemed to float in the air in faintly golden motes. Longmore stood gazing at these luminous particles ;

he could almost have fancied them a swarm of humming insects, murmuring as a refrain, "She has a great deal of *esprit*—she has a great deal of *esprit*." "Yes, she has a great deal," he said, mechanically, turning to the Baron. M. de Mauves glanced at him sharply, as if to ask what the deuce he was talking about. "She has a great deal of intelligence," said Longmore, deliberately, "a great deal of beauty, a great many virtues."

M. de Mauves busied himself for a moment in lighting another cigar, and when he had finished, with a return of his confidential smile, "I suspect you of thinking that I don't do my wife justice," he said. "Take care—take care, young man; that's a dangerous assumption. In general a man always does his wife justice. More than justice," cried the Baron with a laugh—"that we keep for the wives of other men!"

Longmore afterwards remembered it in favour of the Baron's fine manner that he had not measured at this moment the dusky abyss over which it hovered. But a sort of deepening subterranean echo lingered on his spiritual ear. For the present his keenest sensation was a desire to get away and cry aloud that

M. de Mauves was an arrogant fool. He bade him an abrupt good-night, which was to serve also, he said, as good-bye.

“Decidedly, then, you go?” said M. de Mauves, almost peremptorily.

“Decidedly.”

“Of course you will come and say good-bye to Madame de Mauves?” His tone implied that the omission would be very uncivil; but there seemed to Longmore something so ludicrous in his taking a lesson in consideration from M. de Mauves, that he burst into a laugh. The Baron frowned, like a man for whom it was a new and most unpleasant sensation to be perplexed. “You are a queer fellow,” he murmured, as Longmore turned away, not foreseeing that he should think him a very queer fellow indeed before he had done with him.

Longmore sat down to dinner at his hotel with his usual good intentions; but as he was lifting his first glass of wine to his lips, he suddenly fell to musing and set down his wine untasted. His reverie lasted long, and when he emerged from it, his fish was cold; but this mattered little, for his appetite was gone. That evening he packed his trunk with a

kind of indignant energy. This was so effective that the operation was accomplished before bedtime, and as he was not in the least sleepy, he devoted the interval to writing two letters ; one was a short note to Madame de Mauves, which he intrusted to a servant, to be delivered the next morning. He had found it best, he said, to leave Saint-Germain immediately, but he expected to be back in Paris in the early autumn. The other letter was the result of his having remembered a day or two before that he had not yet complied with Mrs. Draper's injunction to give her an account of his impressions of her friend. The present occasion seemed propitious, and he wrote half a dozen pages. His tone, however, was grave, and Mrs. Draper, on receiving them, was slightly disappointed—she would have preferred a stronger flavour of rhapsody. But what chiefly concerns us is the concluding sentences.

“The only time she ever spoke to me of her marriage,” he wrote, “she intimated that it had been a perfect love-match. With all abatements, I suppose most marriages are ; but in her case, I think, this would mean more than in that of most women ; for her love was an absolute idealisation. She

believed her husband was a hero of rose-coloured romance, and he turns out to be not even a hero of very sad-coloured reality. For some time now she has been sounding her mistake, but I don't believe she has touched the bottom of it yet. She strikes me as a person who is begging off from full knowledge—who has struck a truce with painful truth, and is trying a while the experiment of living with closed eyes. In the dark she tries to see again the gilding on her idol. Illusion of course is illusion, and one must always pay for it ; but there is something truly tragical in seeing an earthly penalty levied on such divine folly as this. As for M. de Mauves, he's a Frenchman to his fingers' ends ; and I confess I should dislike him for this if he were a much better man. He can't forgive his wife for having married him too sentimentally and loved him too well ; for in some uncorrupted corner of his being he feels, I suppose, that as she saw him, so he ought to have been. It is a perpetual vexation to him that a little American bourgeoisie should have fancied him a finer fellow than he is, or than he at all wants to be. He has not a glimmering of real acquaintance with his wife ; he can't understand the stream of passion

flowing so clear and still. To tell the truth, I hardly can understand it myself; but when I see the spectacle I can admire it furiously. M. de Mauves, at any rate, would like to have the comfort of feeling that his wife is as corruptible as himself; and you will hardly believe me when I tell you that he goes about intimating to gentlemen whom he deems worthy of the knowledge, that it would be a convenience to him that they should make love to her."

V.

ON reaching Paris, Longmore straightway purchased a Murray's *Belgium*, to help himself to believe that he would start on the morrow for Brussels; but when the morrow came, it occurred to him that, by way of preparation, he ought to acquaint himself more intimately with the Flemish painters in the Louvre. This took a whole morning, but it did little to hasten his departure. He had abruptly left Saint-Germain, because it seemed to him that respect for Madame de Mauves demanded that he should allow her husband no reason to suppose that he had understood him; but now that he had satisfied the behest of delicacy, he found himself thinking more and more ardently of Euphemia. It was a poor expression of ardour to be lingering irresolutely on the deserted Boulevards, but he detested the idea of leaving Saint-Germain five hundred miles behind

him. He felt very foolish, nevertheless, and wandered about nervously, promising himself to take the next train; but a dozen trains started, and Longmore was still in Paris. This sentimental tumult was more than he had bargained for, and, as he looked at the shop windows, he wondered whether it was a "passion." He had never been fond of the word, and had grown up with a kind of horror of what it represented. He had hoped that when he should fall in love, he should do it with an excellent conscience, with no greater agitation than a mild suffusion of cheerfulness. But here was a sentiment concocted of pity and anger, as well as of admiration, and bristling with scruples and doubts. He had come abroad to enjoy the Flemish painters and all others; but what fair-tressed saint of Van Eyck or Memling was so interesting a figure as Madame de Mauves? His restless steps carried him at last out of the long villa-bordered avenue which leads to the Bois de Boulogne.

Summer had fairly begun, and the drive beside the lake was empty, but there were various loungers on the benches and chairs, and the great café had an air of animation. Longmore's walk had given

him an appetite, and he went into the establishment and demanded a dinner, remarking for the hundredth time, as he observed the smart little tables disposed in the open air, how much better they ordered this matter in France.

“Will monsieur dine in the garden, or in the saloon?” asked the waiter. Longmore chose the garden; and observing that a great cluster of June roses was trained over the wall of the house, placed himself at a table near by, where the best of dinners was served him on the whitest of linen, in the most shining of porcelain. It so happened that his table was near a window, and that as he sat he could look into a corner of the saloon. So it was that his attention rested on a lady seated just within the window, which was open, face to face apparently with a companion who was concealed by the curtain. She was a very pretty woman, and Longmore looked at her as often as was consistent with good manners. After a while he even began to wonder who she was, and to suspect that she was one of those ladies whom it is no breach of good manners to look at as often as you like. Longmore, too, if he had been so disposed, would have been the more

free to give her all his attention, that her own was fixed upon the person opposite to her. She was what the French call a *belle brune*, and though our hero, who had rather a conservative taste in such matters, had no great relish for her bold outlines and even bolder colouring, he could not help admiring her expression of basking contentment.

She was evidently very happy, and her happiness gave her an air of innocence. The talk of her friend, whoever he was, abundantly suited her humour, for she sat listening to him with a broad, lazy smile, and interrupted him occasionally, while she crunched her bon-bons, with a murmured response, presumably as broad, which seemed to deepen his eloquence. She drank a great deal of champagne and ate an immense number of strawberries, and was plainly altogether a person with an impartial relish for strawberries, champagne, and what she would have called *bêtises*.

They had half finished dinner when Longmore sat down, and he was still in his place when they rose. She had hung her bonnet on a nail above her chair, and her companion passed round the table to take it down for her. As he did so, she

bent her head to look at a wine-stain on her dress, and in the movement exposed the greater part of the back of a very handsome neck. The gentleman observed it, and observed also, apparently, that the room beyond them was empty ; that he stood within eyeshot of Longmore, he failed to observe. He stooped suddenly and imprinted a gallant kiss on the fair expanse. Longmore then recognised M. de Mauves. The recipient of this vigorous tribute put on her bonnet, using his flushed smile as a mirror, and in a moment they passed through the garden, on their way to their carriage.

Then, for the first time, M. de Mauves perceived Longmore. He measured with a rapid glance the young man's relation to the open window, and checked himself in the impulse to stop and speak to him. He contented himself with bowing with great gravity as he opened the gate for his companion.

That evening Longmore made a railway journey, but not to Brussels. He had effectually ceased to care about Brussels ; the only thing he now cared about was Madame de Mauves. The atmosphere of his mind had had a sudden clearing up ; pity

and anger were still throbbing there, but they had space to rage at their pleasure, for doubts and scruples had abruptly departed. It was little, he felt, that he could interpose between her resignation and the indignity of her position ; but that little, if it involved the sacrifice of everything that bound him to the tranquil past, he could offer her with a rapture which at last made reflection appear a wofully halting substitute for faith. Nothing in his tranquil past had given such a zest to consciousness as this happy sense of choosing to go straight back to Saint-Germain. How to justify his return, how to explain his ardour, troubled him little. He was not sure, even, that he wished to be understood ; he wished only to feel that it was by no fault of his that Madame de Mauves was alone with the ugliness of fate. He was conscious of no distinct desire to "make love" to her ; if he could have uttered the essence of his longing, he would have said that he wished her to remember that in a world coloured gray to her vision by disappointment, there was one vividly honest man. She might certainly have remembered it, however, without his coming back to remind her ; and it is not to be

denied that, as he waited for the morrow he wished immensely to hear the sound of her voice.

He waited the next day till his usual hour of calling—the late afternoon ; but he learned at the door that Madame de Mauves was not at home. The servant offered the information that she was walking in the forest. Longmore went through the garden and out of the little door into the lane, and, after half an hour's vain exploration, saw her coming toward him at the end of a green by-path. As he appeared, she stopped for a moment, as if to turn aside ; then recognising him, she slowly advanced, and he was soon shaking hands with her.

“Nothing has happened,” she said, looking at him fixedly. “You are not ill?”

“Nothing, except that when I got to Paris I found how fond I had grown of Saint-Germain.”

She neither smiled nor looked flattered ; it seemed indeed to Longmore that she was annoyed. But he was uncertain, for he immediately perceived that in his absence the whole character of her face had altered. It told him that something momentous had happened. It was no longer self-contained

melancholy that he read in her eyes, but grief and agitation which had lately struggled with that passionate love of peace of which she had spoken to him, and forced him to know that deep experience is never peaceful. She was pale, and she had evidently been shedding tears. He felt his heart beating hard; he seemed now to know her secrets. She continued to look at him with a contracted brow, as if his return had given her a sense of responsibility too great to be disguised by a commonplace welcome. For some moments, as he turned and walked beside her, neither spoke; then abruptly—"Tell me truly, Mr. Longmore," she said, "why you have come back."

He turned and looked at her with an air which startled her into a certainty of what she had feared. "Because I have learned the real answer to the question I asked you the other day. You are not happy—you are too good to be happy on the terms offered you. Madame de Mauves," he went on with a gesture which protested against a gesture of her own, "I can't be happy if you are not! I don't care for anything so long as I see such an unfathomable sadness in your eyes. I found during

three dreary days in Paris that the thing in the world I most care for is this daily privilege of seeing you. I know it's very brutal to tell you I admire you; it's an insult to you to treat you as if you had complained to me or appealed to me. But such a friendship as I waked up to there"—and he tossed his head toward the distant city—"is a potent force, I assure you; and when forces are compressed they explode. But if you had told me every trouble in your heart, it would have mattered little; I couldn't say more than I must say now—that if that in life from which you have hoped most has given you least, this devoted respect of mine will refuse no service and betray no trust."

She had begun to make marks in the earth with the point of her parasol; but she stopped and listened to him in perfect immobility. Rather, her immobility was not perfect; for when he stopped speaking a faint flush had stolen into her cheek. It told Longmore that she was moved, and his first perceiving it was the happiest instant of his life. She raised her eyes at last, and looked at him with what at first seemed a pleading dread of excessive emotion.

“Thank you—thank you!” she said, calmly enough; but the next moment her own emotion overcame her calmness, and she burst into tears. Her tears vanished as quickly as they came, but they did Longmore a world of good. He had always felt indefinitely afraid of her; her being had somehow seemed fed by a deeper faith and a stronger will than his own; but her half-dozen smothered sobs showed him the bottom of her heart, and assured him that she was weak enough to be grateful.

“Excuse me,” she said; “I am too nervous to listen to you. I believe I could have encountered an enemy to-day, but I can’t endure a friend.”

“You are killing yourself with stoicism—that is what is the matter with you!” he cried. “Listen to a friend for his own sake, if not for yours. I have never ventured to offer you an atom of compassion, and you can’t accuse yourself of an abuse of charity.”

She looked about her with a kind of weary confusion which promised a reluctant attention. But suddenly perceiving by the wayside the fallen log on which they had rested a few evenings before, she went and sat down on it in impatient resignation, and

looked at Longmore, as he stood silent, watching her, with a glance which seemed to urge that, if she was charitable now, he must be very wise.

“Something came to my knowledge yesterday,” he said as he sat down beside her, “which gave me an intense impression of your loneliness. You are truth itself, and there is no truth about you. You believe in purity and duty and dignity, and you live in a world in which they are daily belied. I sometimes ask myself with a kind of rage how you ever came into such a world—and why the perversity of fate never let me know you before.”

“I like my ‘world’ no better than you do, and it was not for its own sake I came into it. But what particular group of people is worth pinning one’s faith upon? I confess it sometimes seems to me that men and women are very poor creatures. I suppose I am romantic. I have an unfortunate taste for poetic fitness. Life is hard prose, and one must learn to read prose contentedly. I believe I once thought that all the prose was in America, which was very foolish. What I thought, what I believed, what I expected, when I was an ignorant girl, fatally addicted to falling in love with my own theories, is more than I can begin

to tell you now. Sometimes, when I remember certain impulses, certain illusions of those days, they take away my breath, and I wonder that my false point of view has not led me into troubles greater than any I have now to lament. I had a conviction which you would probably smile at if I were to attempt to express it to you. It was a singular form for passionate faith to take, but it had all of the sweetness and the ardour of passionate faith. It led me to take a great step, and it lies behind me now in the distance, like a shadow melting slowly in the light of experience. It has faded, but it has not vanished. Some feelings, I am sure, die only with ourselves; some illusions are as much the condition of our life as our heart-beats. They say that life itself is an illusion—that this world is a shadow of which the reality is yet to come. Life is all of a piece, then, and there is no shame in being miserably human. As for my loneliness, it doesn't greatly matter; it is the fault, in part, of my obstinacy. There have been times when I have been frantically distressed, and, to tell you the truth, wretchedly homesick, because my maid—a jewel of a maid—lied to me with every second breath. There have been moments when I have wished I was the

daughter of a poor New England minister, living in a little white house under a couple of elms, and doing all the housework.”

She had begun to speak slowly, with an air of effort ; but she went on quickly, as if talking were a relief. “ My marriage introduced me to people and things which seemed to me at first very strange and then very horrible, and then, to tell the truth, very contemptible. At first I expended a great deal of sorrow and dismay and pity on it all ; but there soon came a time when I began to wonder whether it were worth one’s tears. If I could tell you the eternal friendships I have seen broken, the inconsolable woes consoled, the jealousies and vanities scrambling for precedence, you would agree with me that tempers like yours and mine can understand neither such troubles nor such compensations. A year ago, while I was in the country, a friend of mine was in despair at the infidelity of her husband ; she wrote me a most dolorous letter, and on my return to Paris I went immediately to see her. A week had elapsed, and, as I had seen stranger things, I thought she might have recovered her spirits. Not at all ; she was still in despair—but at what ? At the conduct, the

abandoned, shameless conduct of Madame de T. You'll imagine, of course, that Madame de T. was the lady whom my friend's husband preferred to his wife. Far from it ; he had never seen her. Who, then, was Madame de T. ? Madame de T. was cruelly devoted to M. de V. And who was M. de V. ? M. de V. —in two words, my friend was cultivating two jealousies at once. I hardly know what I said to her ; something, at any rate, that she found unpardonable, for she quite gave me up. Shortly afterward my husband proposed we should cease to live in Paris, and I gladly assented, for I believe I was falling into a state of mind that made me a detestable companion. I should have preferred to go quite into the country, into Auvergne, where my husband has a house. But to him, Paris, in some degree, is necessary, and Saint-Germain has been a sort of compromise."

"A sort of compromise !" Longmore repeated. "That's your whole life."

"It's the life of many people, of most people of quiet tastes, and it is certainly better than acute distress. One is at a loss theoretically to defend a compromise ; but if I found a poor creature who had

managed to invent one, I should think it questionable friendship to expose its "weak side." Madame de Mauves had no sooner uttered these words than she smiled faintly, as if to mitigate their personal application.

"Heaven forbid that one should do that unless one has something better to offer," said Longmore. "And yet I am haunted by a vision of a life in which you should have found no compromises, for they are a perversion of natures that tend only to goodness and rectitude. As I see it, you should have found happiness serene, profound, complete; a *femme de chambre* not a jewel perhaps, but warranted to tell but one fib a day; a society possibly rather provincial, but (in spite of your poor opinion of mankind) a good deal of solid virtue; jealousies and vanities very tame, and no particular iniquities and adulteries. A husband," he added after a moment—"a husband of your own faith and race and spiritual substance, who would have loved you well."

She rose to her feet, shaking her head. "You are very kind to go to the expense of visions for me. Visions are vain things; we must make the best of the reality."

“And yet,” said Longmore, provoked by what seemed the very wantonness of her patience, “the reality, if I am not mistaken, has very recently taken a shape that keenly tests your philosophy.”

She seemed on the point of replying that his sympathy was too zealous; but a couple of impatient tears in his eyes proved that it was founded on a devotion of which it was impossible to make light. “Philosophy?” she said. “I have none. Thank Heaven!” she cried, with vehemence, “I have none. I believe, Mr. Longmore,” she added in a moment, “that I have nothing on earth but a conscience—it’s a good time to tell you so—nothing but a dogged, obstinate, clinging conscience. Does that prove me to be indeed of your faith and race, and have you one for which you can say as much? I don’t say it in vanity, for I believe that if my conscience will prevent me from doing anything very base, it will effectually prevent me from doing anything very fine.”

“I am delighted to hear it,” cried Longmore. “We are made for each other. It’s very certain I too shall never do anything fine. And yet I have fancied that in my case this unaccommodating organ might

be blinded and gagged a while, in a fine cause, if not turned out of doors. In yours," he went on with the same appealing irony, "is it absolutely inexpugnable?"

But she made no concession to his sarcasm. "Don't laugh at your conscience," she answered gravely; "that's the only blasphemy I know."

She had hardly spoken when she turned suddenly at an unexpected sound, and at the same moment Longmore heard a footstep in an adjacent by-path which crossed their own at a short distance from where they stood.

"It's M. de Mauves," said Euphemia directly, and moved slowly forward. Longmore, wondering how she knew it, had overtaken her by the time her husband advanced into sight. A solitary walk in the forest was a pastime to which M. de Mauves was not addicted, but he seemed on this occasion to have resorted to it with some equanimity. He was smoking a fragrant cigar, and his thumb was thrust into the armhole of his waistcoat, with an air of contemplative serenity. He stopped short with surprise on seeing his wife and her companion, and to Longmore his surprise seemed impertinent. He

glanced rapidly from one to the other, fixed Longmore's eye sharply for a single instant, and then lifted his hat with formal politeness.

"I was not aware," he said, turning to Madame de Mauves; "that I might congratulate you on the return of monsieur."

"You should have known it," she answered gravely, "if I had expected Mr. Longmore's return."

She had become very pale, and Longmore felt that this was a first meeting after a stormy parting. "My return was unexpected to myself," he said. "I came last evening."

M. de Mauves smiled with extreme urbanity. "It is needless for me to welcome you. Madame de Mauves knows the duties of hospitality." And with another bow he continued his walk.

Madame de Mauves and her companion returned slowly home, with few words, but, on Longmore's part at least, many thoughts. The Baron's appearance had given him an angry chill; it was a dusky cloud reabsorbing the light which had begun to shine between himself and his companion.

He watched Euphemia narrowly as they went, and wondered what she had last had to suffer. Her

husband's presence had checked her disposition to talk, but nothing indicated that she had acknowledged the insulting meaning of his words. Matters were evidently at a crisis between them, and Longmore wondered vainly what it was on Euphemia's part that prevented an absolute rupture. What did she suspect?—how much did she know? To what was she resigned?—how much had she forgiven? How, above all, did she reconcile with knowledge, or with suspicion, that ineradicable tenderness of which she had just now all but assured him? “She has loved him once,” Longmore said with a sinking of the heart, “and with her to love once is to commit one's self for ever. Her husband thinks her too stiff! What would a poet call it?”

He relapsed with a kind of aching impotence into the sense of her being somehow beyond him, unattainable, immeasurable by his own fretful logic. Suddenly he gave three passionate switches in the air with his cane, which made Madame de Mauves look round. She could hardly have guessed that they meant that where ambition was so vain, it was an innocent compensation to plunge into worship.

Madame de Mauves found in her drawing-room

the little elderly Frenchman, M. de Chalumeau, whom Longmore had observed a few days before on the terrace. On this occasion, too, Madame Clairin was entertaining him, but as his sister-in-law came in she surrendered her post and addressed herself to our hero. Longmore, at thirty, was still an ingenuous youth, and there was something in this lady's large coquetry which had the power of making him blush. He was surprised at finding he had not absolutely forfeited her favour by his deportment at their last interview, and a suspicion of her being prepared to approach him on another line completed his uneasiness.

"So you have returned from Brussels by way of the forest?" she said.

"I have not been to Brussels. I returned yesterday from Paris by the only way—by the train."

Madame Clairin stared and laughed. "I have never known a young man to be so fond of Saint-Germain. They generally declare it's horribly dull."

"That's not very polite to you," said Longmore, who was vexed at his blushes, and determined not to be abashed.

"Ah, what am I?" demanded Madame Clairin,

swinging open her fan. "I am the dullest thing here. They have not had your success with my sister-in-law."

"It would have been very easy to have it. Madame de Mauves is kindness itself."

"To her own countrymen!"

Longmore remained silent; he hated the tone of this conversation. Madame Clairin looked at him a moment, and then turned her head and surveyed Euphemia, to whom M. de Chalumeau was serving up another epigram, which she was receiving with a slight droop of the head and her eyes absently wandering through the window. "Don't pretend to tell me," she murmured suddenly, "that you are not in love with that pretty woman."

"*Allons donc!*" cried Longmore, in the best French he had ever uttered. He rose the next minute, and took a hasty farewell.

VI.

HE allowed several days to pass without going back ; it seemed delicate to appear not to regard Madame de Mauves' frankness during their last interview as a general invitation. This cost him a great effort, for hopeless passions are not the most deferential ; and he had, moreover, a constant fear that if, as he believed, the hour of supreme explanations had come, the magic of her magnanimity might convert M. de Mauves. Vicious men, it was abundantly recorded, had been so converted as to be acceptable to God, and the something divine in Euphemia's temper would sanctify any means she should choose to employ. Her means, he kept repeating, were no business of his, and the essence of his admiration ought to be to allow her to do as she liked ; but he felt as if he should turn away into a world out of which most of the joy had departed,

if she should like, after all, to see nothing more in his interest in her than might be repaid by a murmured "Thank you."

When he called again he found to his vexation that he was to run the gauntlet of Madame Clairin's officious hospitality. It was one of the first mornings of perfect summer, and the drawing-room, through the open windows, was flooded with a sweet confusion of odours and bird-notes which filled him with the hope that Madame de Mauves would come out and spend half the day in the forest. But Madame Clairin, with her hair not yet dressed, emerged like a brassy discord in a maze of melody.

At the same moment the servant returned with Euphemia's regrets; she was "indisposed," and was unable to see Mr. Longmore. The young man knew that he looked disappointed and that Madame Clairin was observing him, and this consciousness impelled him to give her a glance of almost aggressive frigidity. This was apparently what she desired. She wished to throw him off his balance, and, if she was not mistaken, she had the means.

"Put down your hat, Mr. Longmore," she said, "and be polite for once. You were not at all polite

the other day when I asked you that friendly question about the state of your heart."

"I have no heart—to talk about," said Longmore, uncompromisingly.

"As well say you have none at all. I advise you to cultivate a little eloquence; you may have use for it. That was not an idle question of mine; I don't ask idle questions. For a couple of months now that you have been coming and going among us, it seems to me that you have had very few to answer of any sort."

"I have certainly been very well treated," said Longmore.

Madame Clairin was silent a moment, and then—

"Have you never felt disposed to ask any?" she demanded.

Her look, her tone, were so charged with round-about meanings that it seemed to Longmore as if even to understand her would savour of dishonest complicity. "What is it you have to tell me?" he asked, frowning and blushing.

Madame Clairin flushed. It is rather hard, when you come bearing yourself very much as the sibyl when she came to the Roman king, to be treated

as something worse than a vulgar gossip. "I might tell you, Mr. Longmore," she said, "that you have as bad a *ton* as any young man I ever met. Where have you lived—what are your ideas? I wish to call your attention to a fact which it takes some delicacy to touch upon. You have noticed, I suppose, that my sister-in-law is not the happiest woman in the world."

Longmore assented with a gesture.

Madame Clairin looked slightly disappointed at his want of enthusiasm. Nevertheless—"You have formed, I suppose," she continued, "your conjectures on the causes of her—dissatisfaction."

"Conjecture has been superfluous. I have seen the causes—or at least a specimen of them—with my own eyes."

"I know perfectly what you mean. My brother, in a single word, is in love with another woman. I don't judge him; I don't judge my sister-in-law. I permit myself to say that in her position I would have managed otherwise. I would either have kept my husband's affection, or I would have frankly done without it. But my sister is an odd compound; I don't profess to understand her. Therefore it is, in

a measure, that I appeal to you, her fellow-countryman. Of course you will be surprised at my way of looking at the matter, and I admit that it's a way in use only among people whose family traditions compel them to take a superior view of things." Madame Clairin paused, and Longmore wondered where her family traditions were going to lead her.

"Listen," she went on. "There has never been a De Mauves who has not given his wife the right to be jealous. We know our history for ages back, and the fact is established. It's a shame if you like, but it's something to have a shame with such a pedigree. Our men have been real Frenchmen, and their wives—I may say it—have been worthy of them. You may see all their portraits at our house in Auvergne; every one of them an 'injured' beauty, but not one of them hanging her head. Not one of them had the bad taste to be jealous, and yet not one in a dozen was guilty of an escapade—not one of them was talked about. There's good sense for you! How they managed—go and look at the dusky, faded canvases and pastels, and ask. They were *femmes d'esprit*! When they had a headache, they

put on a little rouge and came to supper as usual ; and when they had a heart-ache, they put a little rouge on their hearts. These are great traditions, and it doesn't seem to me fair that a little American bourgeoisie should come in and pretend to alter them, and should hang her photograph, with her obstinate little *air penché*, in the gallery of our shrewd fine ladies. A De Mauves must be of the old race. When she married my brother, I don't suppose she took him for a member of a *société de bonnes œuvres*. I don't say we are right ; who is right ? But we are as history has made us, and if any one is to change, it had better be my sister-in-law herself." Again Madame Clairin paused, and opened and closed her fan. "Let her conform!" she said, with amazing audacity.

Longmore's reply was ambiguous ; he simply said, "Ah!"

Madame Clairin's historical retrospect had apparently imparted an honest zeal to her indignation. "For a long time," she continued, "my sister has been taking the attitude of an injured woman, affecting a disgust with the world, and shutting herself up to read free-thinking books. I have never permitted

myself any observation on her conduct, but I have quite lost patience with it. When a woman with her prettiness lets her husband stray away, she deserves her fate. I don't wish you to agree with me—on the contrary; but I call such a woman a goose. She must have bored him to death. What has passed between them for many months needn't concern us; what provocation my sister has had—monstrous, if you wish—what ennui my brother has suffered. It's enough that a week ago, just after you had ostensibly gone to Brussels, something happened to produce an explosion. She found a letter in his pocket—a photograph—a trinket—*que sais-je?* At any rate, the scene was terrible. I didn't listen at the keyhole, and I don't know what was said; but I have reason to believe that my brother was called to account as I fancy none of his ancestors have ever been—even by injured mistresses!”

Longmore had leaned forward in silent attention with his elbows on his knees; and now instinctively he dropped his face into his hands. “Ah, poor woman!” he groaned.

“Voilà!” said Madame Clairin. “You pity her.”

“Pity her?” cried Longmore, looking up with ardent eyes and forgetting the spirit of Madame Clairin’s narrative in the miserable facts. “Don’t you?”

“A little. But I am not acting sentimentally; I am acting politically. We have always been a political family. I wish to arrange things—to see my brother free to do as he chooses—to see Euphemia contented. Do you understand me?”

“Very well, I think. You are the most immoral person I have lately had the privilege of conversing with.”

Madame Clairin shrugged her shoulders. “Possibly. When was there a great politician who was not immoral?”

“Ah no,” said Longmore in the same tone. “You are too superficial to be a great politician. You don’t begin to know anything about Madame de Mauves.”

Madame Clairin inclined her head to one side, eyed Longmore sharply, mused a moment, and then smiled with an excellent imitation of intelligent compassion. “It’s not in my interest to contradict you.”

"It would be in your interest to learn, Madame Clairin," the young man went on with unceremonious candour, "what honest men most admire in a woman—and to recognise it when you see it."

Longmore certainly did injustice to her talents for diplomacy, for she covered her natural annoyance at this sally with a pretty piece of irony. "So you *are* in love!" she quietly exclaimed.

Longmore was silent a while. "I wonder if you would understand me," he said at last, "if I were to tell you that I have for Madame de Mauves the most devoted friendship?"

"You underrate my intelligence. But in that case you ought to exert your influence to put an end to these painful domestic scenes."

"Do you suppose that she talks to me about her domestic scenes?" cried Longmore.

Madame Clairin stared. "Then your friendship isn't returned?" And as Longmore turned away, shaking his head—"Now, at least," she added, "she will have something to tell you. I happen to know the upshot of my brother's last interview with his wife." Longmore rose to his feet as a sort of protest against the indelicacy of the position in which

he found himself; but all that made him tender made him curious, and she caught in his averted eyes an expression which prompted her to strike her blow. "My brother is monstrously in love with a certain person in Paris; of course he ought not to be; but he wouldn't be my brother if he were not. It was this irregular passion that dictated his words. 'Listen to me, madam,' he cried at last; 'let us live like people who understand life! It is unpleasant to be forced to say such things outright, but you have a way of bringing one down to the rudiments. I am faithless, I am heartless, I am brutal, I am everything horrible—it's understood. Take your revenge, console yourself; you are too pretty a woman to have anything to complain of. Here is a handsome young man sighing himself into a consumption for you. Listen to the poor fellow, and you will find that virtue is none the less becoming for being good-natured. You will see that it's not after all such a doleful world, and that there is even an advantage in having the most impudent of husbands.'" Madame Clairin paused; Longmore had turned very pale. "You may believe it," she said; "the speech took place in my presence;

things were done in order. And now, Mr. Longmore"—this with a smile which he was too troubled at the moment to appreciate, but which he remembered later with a kind of awe—"we count upon you!"

"He said this to her, face to face, as you say it to me now?" Longmore asked slowly, after a silence.

"Word for word, and with the greatest politeness."

"And Madame de Mauves—what did she say?"

Madame Clairin smiled again. "To such a speech as that a woman says—nothing. She had been sitting with a piece of needlework, and I think she had not seen her husband since their quarrel the day before. He came in with the gravity of an ambassador, and I am sure that when he made his *demande en mariage* his manner was not more respectful. He only wanted white gloves!" said Madame Clairin. "Euphemia sat silent a few moments, drawing her stitches, and then without a word, without a glance, she walked out of the room. It was just what she should have done!"

"Yes," Longmore repeated, "it was just what she should have done."

“And I, left alone with my brother, do you know what I said?”

Longmore shook his head. “*Mauvais sujet!*” he suggested.

“‘You have done me the honour,’ I said, ‘to take this step in my presence. I don’t pretend to qualify it. You know what you are about, and it’s your own affair. But you may confide in my discretion.’ Do you think he has had reason to complain of it?” She received no answer; Longmore was slowly turning away and passing his gloves mechanically round the band of his hat. “I hope,” she cried, “you are not going to start for Brussels!”

Plainly, Longmore was deeply disturbed, and Madame Clairin might congratulate herself on the success of her plea for old-fashioned manners. And yet there was something that left her more puzzled than satisfied in the reflective tone with which he answered, “No, I shall remain here for the present.” The processes of his mind seemed provokingly subterranean, and she could have fancied for a moment that he was linked with her sister in some monstrous conspiracy of asceticism.

“Come this evening,” she boldly resumed. “The

rest will take care of itself. Meanwhile I shall take the liberty of telling my sister-in-law that I have repeated—in short, that I have put you *au fait*.”

Longmore started and coloured, and she hardly knew whether he were going to assent or to demur. “Tell her what you please. Nothing you can tell her will affect her conduct.”

“Voyons! Do you mean to tell me that a woman young, pretty, sentimental, neglected—insulted, if you will —? I see you don’t believe it. Believe simply in your own opportunity! But for Heaven’s sake, if it is to lead anywhere, don’t come back with that *visage de croquemort*. You look as if you were going to bury your heart—not to offer it to a pretty woman. You are much better when you smile—you are very nice then. Come, do yourself justice.”

“Yes,” he said, “I must do myself justice.” And abruptly, with a bow, he took his departure.

VII.

HE felt, when he found himself unobserved, in the open air, that he must plunge into violent action, walk fast and far, and defer the opportunity for thought. He strode away into the forest, swinging his cane, throwing back his head, gazing away into the verdurous vistas, and following the road without a purpose. He felt immensely excited, but he could hardly have said whether his emotion was a pain or a joy. It was joyous as all increase of freedom is joyous; something seemed to have been cleared out of his path; his destiny appeared to have rounded a cape and brought him into sight of an open sea. But his freedom resolved itself somehow into the need of despising all mankind, with a single exception; and the fact of Madame de Mauves inhabiting a planet contaminated by the presence of this baser

multitude kept his elation from seeming a pledge of ideal bliss.

But she was there, and circumstances now forced them to be intimate. She had ceased to have what men call a secret for him, and this fact itself brought with it a sort of rapture. He had no prevision that he should "profit," in the vulgar sense, by the extraordinary position into which they had been thrown; it might be but a cruel trick of destiny to make hope a harsher mockery and renunciation a keener suffering. But above all this rose the conviction that she could do nothing that would not deepen his admiration.

It was this feeling that circumstance—odious as it was in itself—was to force the beauty of her character into more perfect relief, that made him stride along as if he were celebrating a kind of spiritual festival. He rambled at random for a couple of hours, and found at last that he had left the forest behind him and had wandered into an unfamiliar region. It was a perfectly rural scene, and the still summer day gave it a charm for which its meagre elements but half accounted.

Longmore thought he had never seen anything so

characteristically French ; all the French novels seemed to have described it, all the French landscapists to have painted it. The fields and trees were of a cool metallic green ; the grass looked as if it might stain your trousers, and the foliage your hands. The clear light had a sort of mild greyness ; the sunbeams were of silver rather than gold. A great red-roofed, high-stacked farmhouse, with white-washed walls and a straggling yard, surveyed the high road, on one side, from behind a transparent curtain of poplars. A narrow stream, half choked with emerald rushes and edged with grey aspens, occupied the opposite quarter. The meadows rolled and sloped away gently to the low horizon, which was barely concealed by the continuous line of clipped and marshalled trees. The prospect was not rich, but it had a frank homeliness which touched the young man's fancy. It was full of light atmosphere and diffused sunshine, and if it was prosaic, it was soothing.

Longmore was disposed to walk further, and he advanced along the road beneath the poplars. In twenty minutes he came to a village which straggled away to the right, among orchards and *potagers*. On

the left, at a stone's throw from the road, stood a little pink-faced inn, which reminded him that he had not breakfasted, having left home with a provision of hospitality from Madame de Mauves. In the inn he found a brick-tiled parlour and a hostess in sabots and a white cap, whom, over the omelette she speedily served him—borrowing licence from the bottle of sound red wine which accompanied it—he assured that she was a true artist. To reward his compliment, she invited him to smoke his cigar in her little garden behind the house.

Here he found a *tonnelle* and a view of ripening crops, stretching down to the stream. The *tonnelle* was rather close, and he preferred to lounge on a bench against the pink wall, in the sun, which was not too hot. Here, as he rested and gazed and mused, he fell into a train of thought which, in an indefinable fashion, was a soft influence from the scene about him. His heart, which had been beating fast for the past three hours, gradually checked its pulses and left him looking at life with a rather more level gaze. The homely tavern sounds coming out through the open windows, the sunny stillness of the fields and crops, which covered so much

vigorous natural life, suggested very little that was transcendental, had very little to say about renunciation—nothing at all about spiritual zeal. They seemed to utter a message from plain ripe nature, to express the unperverted reality of things, to say that the common lot is not brilliantly amusing, and that the part of wisdom is to grasp frankly at experience, lest you miss it altogether. What reason there was for his falling a-wondering after this whether a deeply wounded heart might be soothed and healed by such a scene, it would be difficult to explain; certain it is that, as he sat there, he had a waking dream of an unhappy woman strolling by the slow-flowing stream before him, and pulling down the fruit-laden boughs in the orchards. He mused and mused, and at last found himself feeling angry that he could not somehow think worse of Madame de Mauves—or at any rate think otherwise. He could fairly claim that in a sentimental way he asked very little of life—he made modest demands on passion; why then should his only passion be born to ill-fortune? why should his first—his last—glimpse of positive happiness be so indissolubly linked with renunciation?

It is perhaps because, like many spirits of the

same stock, he had in his composition a lurking principle of asceticism to whose authority he had ever paid an unquestioning respect, that he now felt all the vehemence of rebellion. To renounce—to renounce again—to renounce for ever—was this all that youth and longing and resolve were meant for? Was experience to be muffled and mutilated, like an indecent picture? Was a man to sit and deliberately condemn his future to be the blank memory of a regret, rather than the long reverberation of a joy? Sacrifice? The word was a trap for minds muddled by fear, an ignoble refuge of weakness. To insist now seemed not to dare, but simply to be, to live on possible terms.

His hostess came out to hang a cloth to dry on the hedge, and, though her guest was sitting quietly enough, she seemed to see in his kindled eyes a flattering testimony to the quality of her wine.

As she turned back into the house, she was met by a young man whom Longmore observed in spite of his pre-occupation. He was evidently a member of that jovial fraternity of artists whose very shabbiness has an affinity with the element of picturesqueness and unexpectedness in life—that element which

provokes so much unformulated envy among people foredoomed to be respectable.

Longmore was struck first with his looking like a very clever man, and then with his looking like a very happy one. The combination, as it was expressed in his face, might have arrested the attention of even a less cynical philosopher. He had a slouched hat and a blond beard, a light easel under one arm, and an unfinished sketch in oils under the other.

He stopped and stood talking for some moments to the landlady, with a peculiarly good-humoured smile. They were discussing the possibilities of dinner; the hostess enumerated some very savoury ones, and he nodded briskly, assenting to everything. It couldn't be, Longmore thought, that he found such soft contentment in the prospect of lamb-chops and spinach and a *croûte aux fruits*. When the dinner had been ordered, he turned up his sketch, and the good woman fell a-wondering and looking away at the spot by the stream-side where he had made it.

Was it his work, Longmore wondered, that made him so happy? Was a strong talent the best thing in the world? The landlady went back to her kitchen, and the young painter stood, as if he were

waiting for something, beside the gate which opened upon the path across the fields. Longmore sat brooding and asking himself whether it was better to cultivate one of the arts than to cultivate one of the passions. Before he had answered the question the painter had grown tired of waiting. He picked up a pebble, tossed it lightly into an upper window, and called, "Claudine!"

Claudine appeared; Longmore heard her at the window, bidding the young man to have patience. "But I am losing my light," he said; "I must have my shadows in the same place as yesterday."

"Go without me, then," Claudine answered; "I will join you in ten minutes." Her voice was fresh and young; it seemed to say to Longmore that she was as happy as her companion.

"Don't forget the Chénier," cried the young man; and turning away, he passed out of the gate and followed the path across the fields until he disappeared among the trees by the side of the stream. Who was Claudine? Longmore vaguely wondered; and was she as pretty as her voice? Before long he had a chance to satisfy himself; she came out of the house with her hat and parasol, prepared to

follow her companion. She had on a pink muslin dress and a little white hat, and she was as pretty as a Frenchwoman needs to be to be pleasing. She had a clear brown skin and a bright dark eye, and a step which seemed to keep time to some slow music, heard only by herself. Her hands were encumbered with various articles which she seemed to intend to carry with her. In one arm she held her parasol and a large roll of needlework, and in the other a shawl and a heavy white umbrella, such as painters use for sketching. Meanwhile she was trying to thrust into her pocket a paper-covered volume which Longmore saw to be the Poems of André Chénier; but in the effort she dropped the large umbrella, and uttered a half-smiling exclamation of disgust. Longmore stepped forward and picked up the umbrella, and as she, protesting her gratitude, put out her hand to take it, it seemed to him that she was unbecomingly overburdened.

“You have too much to carry,” he said; “you must let me help you.”

“You are very good, monsieur,” she answered. ‘My husband always forgets something. He can

do nothing without his umbrella. He is *d'une étourderie—*”

“You must allow me to carry the umbrella,” Longmore said; “it’s too heavy for a lady.”

She assented, after many compliments to his politeness; and he walked by her side into the meadow. She went lightly and rapidly, picking her steps and glancing forward to catch a glimpse of her husband. She was graceful, she was charming, she had an air of decision and yet of sweetness, and it seemed to Longmore that a young artist would work none the worse for having her seated at his side reading Chénier’s iambics. They were newly married, he supposed, and evidently their path of life had none of the mocking crookedness of some others. They asked little; but what need one ask more than such quiet summer days, with the creature one loves, by a shady stream, with art and books and a wide, unshadowed horizon? To spend such a morning, to stroll back to dinner in the red-tiled parlour of the inn, to ramble away again as the sun got low—all this was a vision of bliss which floated before him only to torture him with a sense of the impossible. All Frenchwomen are not

coquettes, he remarked, as he kept pace with his companion. She uttered a word now and then, for politeness' sake, but she never looked at him, and seemed not in the least to care that he was a well-favoured young man. She cared for nothing but the young artist in the shabby coat and the slouched hat, and for discovering where he had set up his easel.

This was soon done. He was encamped under the trees, close to the stream, and, in the diffused green shade of the little wood, seemed to be in no immediate need of his umbrella. He received a vivacious rebuke, however, for forgetting it, and was informed of what he owed to Longmore's complaisance. He was duly grateful; he thanked our hero warmly, and offered him a seat on the grass. But Longmore felt like a marplot, and lingered only long enough to glance at the young man's sketch, and to see it was a very clever rendering of the silvery stream and the vivid green rushes. The young wife had spread her shawl on the grass at the base of a tree, and meant to seat herself when Longmore had gone, and murmur Chénier's verses to the music of the gurgling river. Longmore looked

a while from one to the other, barely stifled a sigh, bade them good morning, and took his departure.

He knew neither where to go nor what to do; he seemed afloat on the sea of ineffectual longing. He strolled slowly back to the inn, and in the doorway met the landlady coming back from the butcher's with the lamb-chops for the dinner of her lodgers.

"Monsieur has made the acquaintance of the *dame* of our young painter," she said with a broad smile—a smile too broad for malicious meanings. "Monsieur has perhaps seen the young man's picture. It appears that he has a great deal of talent."

"His picture was very pretty," said Longmore, "but his *dame* was prettier still."

"She's a very nice little woman; but I pity her all the more."

"I don't see why she's to be pitied," said Longmore; "they seem a very happy couple."

The landlady gave a knowing nod.

"Don't trust to it, monsieur! Those artists—*ça n'a pas de principes!* From one day to another he can plant her there! I know them, *allez*. I

have had them here very often ; one year with one, another year with another."

Longmore was puzzled for a moment. Then, "You mean she is not his wife?" he asked.

She shrugged her shoulders. "What shall I tell you? They are not *des hommes sérieux*, those gentlemen! They don't engage themselves for an eternity. It's none of my business, and I have no wish to speak ill of madame. She's a very nice little woman, and she loves her *jeune homme* to distraction."

"Who is she?" asked Longmore. "What do you know about her?"

"Nothing for certain; but it's my belief that she's better than he. I have even gone so far as to believe that she's a lady—a true lady—and that she has given up a great many things for him. I do the best I can for them, but I don't believe she has been obliged all her life to content herself with a dinner of two courses." And she turned over her lamb-chops tenderly, as if to say that though a good cook could imagine better things, yet if you could have but one course, lamb-chops had much in their favour. "I shall cook them with bread-crumbs. *Voilà les femmes, monsieur!*"

Longmore turned away with the feeling that women were indeed a measureless mystery, and that it was hard to say whether there was greater beauty in their strength or in their weakness. He walked back to Saint-Germain, more slowly than he had come, with less philosophic resignation to any event, and more of the urgent egotism of the passion which philosophers call the supremely selfish one. Every now and then the episode of the happy young painter and the charming woman who had given up a great many things for him rose vividly in his mind, and seemed to mock his moral unrest like some obtrusive vision of unattainable bliss.

The landlady's gossip had cast no shadow on its brightness; her voice seemed that of the vulgar chorus of the uninitiated, which stands always ready with its gross prose rendering of the inspired passages of human action. Was it possible a man could take *that* from a woman—take all that lent lightness to that other woman's footstep and intensity to her glance—and not give her the absolute certainty of a devotion as unalterable as the process of the sun? Was it possible that such a rapturous union had the seeds of trouble—that the charm of such a perfect

accord could be broken by anything but death? Longmore felt an immense desire to cry out a thousand times "No!" for it seemed to him at last that he was somehow spiritually the same as the young painter, and that the latter's companion had the soul of Euphemia.

The heat of the sun, as he walked along, became oppressive, and when he re-entered the forest he turned aside into the deepest shade he could find, and stretched himself on the mossy ground at the foot of a great beech. He lay for a while staring up into the verdurous dusk overhead, and trying to conceive Madame de Mauves hastening towards some quiet stream-side where he waited, as he had seen that trusting creature do an hour before. It would be hard to say how well he succeeded; but the effort soothed him rather than excited him, and as he had had a good deal both of moral and physical fatigue, he sank at last into a quiet sleep.

While he slept he had a strange, vivid dream. He seemed to be in a wood, very much like the one on which his eyes had lately closed; but the wood was divided by the murmuring stream he had left an hour before. He was walking up and down, he thought,

restlessly and in intense expectation of some momentous event. Suddenly, at a distance, through the trees, he saw the gleam of a woman's dress, and hurried forward to meet her. As he advanced he recognised her, but he saw at the same time that she was on the opposite bank of the river. She seemed at first not to notice him, but when they were opposite each other she stopped and looked at him very gravely and pityingly. She made him no motion that he should cross the stream, but he wished greatly to stand by her side. He knew the water was deep, and it seemed to him that he knew that he should have to plunge, and that he feared that when he rose to the surface she would have disappeared. Nevertheless, he was going to plunge, when a boat turned into the current from above and came swiftly towards them, guided by an oarsman who was sitting so that they could not see his face. He brought the boat to the bank where Longmore stood ; the latter stepped in, and with a few strokes they touched the opposite shore. Longmore got out, and, though he was sure he had crossed the stream, Madame de Mauves was not there. He turned with a kind of agony and saw that now she was on the other bank—the one he had

left. She gave him a grave, silent glance, and walked away up the stream. The boat and the boatman resumed their course, but after going a short distance they stopped, and the boatman turned back and looked at the still divided couple. Then Longmore recognised him—just as he had recognised him a few days before at the restaurant in the Bois de Boulogne.

VIII.

HE must have 'slept some time after he ceased dreaming, for he had no immediate memory of his dream. It came back to him later, after he had roused himself and had walked nearly home. No great ingenuity was needed to make it seem a rather striking allegory, and it haunted and oppressed him for the rest of the day. He took refuge, however, in his quickened conviction that the only sound policy in life is to grasp unsparingly at happiness; and it seemed no more than one of the vigorous measures dictated by such a policy, to return that evening to Madame de Mauves. And yet when he had decided to do so, and had carefully dressed himself, he felt an irresistible nervous tremor which made it easier to linger at his open window, wondering, with a strange mixture of dread and desire, whether Madame Clairin had told her sister-in-law what she had told him. His

presence now might be simply a gratuitous annoyance ; and yet his absence might seem to imply that it was in the power of circumstances to make them ashamed to meet each other's eyes. He sat a long time with his head in his hands, lost in a painful confusion of hopes and questionings. He felt at moments as if he could throttle Madame Clairin, and yet he could not help asking himself whether it were not possible that she had done him a service. It was late when he left the hotel, and as he entered the gate of the other house his heart was beating so fast that he was sure his voice would show it.

The servant ushered him into the drawing-room, which was empty, with the lamp burning low. But the long windows were open, and their light curtains swaying in a soft, warm wind, so that Longmore immediately stepped out upon the terrace. There he found Madame de Mauves alone, slowly pacing up and down. She was dressed in white, very simply, and her hair was arranged, not as she usually wore it, but in a single loose coil, like that of a person unprepared for company.

She stopped when she saw Longmore, seemed slightly startled, uttered an exclamation, and stood

waiting for him to speak. He looked at her, tried to say something, but found no words. He knew it was awkward, it was offensive, to stand gazing at her; but he could not say what was suitable, and he dared not say what he wished.

Her face was indistinct in the dim light, but he could see that her eyes were fixed on him, and he wondered what they expressed. Did they warn him, did they plead, or did they confess to a sense of provocation? For an instant his head swam; he felt as if it would make all things clear to stride forward and fold her in his arms. But a moment later he was still standing looking at her; he had not moved; he knew that she had spoken, but he had not understood her.

“You were here this morning,” she continued; and now, slowly, the meaning of her words came to him. “I had a bad headache and had to shut myself up.” She spoke in her usual voice.

Longmore mastered his agitation and answered her without betraying himself. “I hope you are better now.”

“Yes, thank you, I am better—much better.”

He was silent a moment, and she moved away to

a chair and seated herself. After a pause he followed her and stood before her, leaning against the balustrade of the terrace. "I hoped you might have been able to come out for the morning into the forest. I went alone ; it was a lovely day, and I took a long walk."

"It was a lovely day," she said, absently, and sat with her eyes lowered, slowly opening and closing her fan. Longmore, as he watched her, felt more and more sure that her sister-in-law had seen her since her interview with him ; that her attitude towards him was changed. It was this same something that chilled the ardour with which he had come, or at least converted the dozen passionate speeches that kept rising to his lips into a kind of reverential silence. No, certainly, he could not clasp her to his arms now, any more than some antique worshipper could have clasped the marble statue in his temple. But Longmore's statue spoke at last, with a full human voice, and even with a shade of human hesitation. She looked up, and it seemed to him that her eyes shone through the dusk.

"I am very glad you came this evening," she said. "I have a particular reason for being glad. I half

expected you, and yet I thought it possible you might not come."

"As I have been feeling all day," Longmore answered, "it was impossible I should not come. I have spent the day in thinking of you."

She made no immediate reply, but continued to open and close her fan thoughtfully. At last—"I have something to say to you," she said abruptly. "I want you to know to a certainty that I have a very high opinion of you." Longmore started and shifted his position. To what was she coming? But he said nothing, and she went on—

"I take a great interest in you; there is no reason why I should not say it—I have a great friendship for you."

He began to laugh; he hardly knew why, unless that this seemed the very mockery of coldness. But she continued without heeding him—

"You know, I suppose, that a great disappointment always implies a great confidence—a great hope?"

"I have hoped," he said, "hoped strongly; but doubtless never rationally enough to have a right to bemoan my disappointment."

“You do yourself injustice. I have such confidence in your reason that I should be greatly disappointed if I were to find it wanting.”

“I really almost believe that you are amusing yourself at my expense,” cried Longmore. “My reason? Reason is a mere word! The only reality in the world is the thing one *feels!*”

She rose to her feet and looked at him gravely. His eyes by this time were accustomed to the imperfect light, and he could see that her look was reproachful, and yet that it was beseechingly kind. She shook her head impatiently, and laid her fan upon his arm with a strong pressure.

“If that were so, it would be a weary world. I know what you feel, however, nearly enough. You needn't try to express it. It's enough that it gives me the right to ask a favour of you—to make an urgent, a solemn request.”

“Make it; I listen.”

“*Don't disappoint me.* If you don't understand me now, you will to-morrow, or very soon. When I said just now that I had a very high opinion of you, I meant it very seriously. It was not a vain compliment. I believe that there is no appeal one

may make to your generosity which can remain long unanswered. If this were to happen,—if I were to find you selfish where I thought you generous, narrow where I thought you large”—and she spoke slowly, with her voice lingering with emphasis on each of these words—“vulgar where I thought you rare—I should think worse of human nature. I should suffer—I should suffer keenly. I should say to myself in the dull days of the future, ‘There was one man who might have done so and so; and he, too, failed.’ But this shall not be. You have made too good an impression on me not to make the very best. If you wish to please me for ever, there is a way.”

She was standing close to him, with her dress touching him, her eyes fixed on his. As she went on her manner grew strangely intense, and she had the singular appearance of a woman preaching reason with a kind of passion. Longmore was confused, dazzled, almost bewildered. The intention of her words was all remonstrance, refusal, dismissal; but her presence there, so close, so urgent, so personal, seemed a distracting contradiction of it. She had never been so lovely. In her white dress, with

her pale face and deeply lighted eyes, she seemed the very spirit of the summer night. When she had ceased speaking she drew a long breath; Longmore felt it on his cheek, and it stirred in his whole being a sudden rapturous conjecture: Were her words in their soft severity a mere delusive spell, meant to throw into relief her almost ghostly beauty, and was this the only truth, the only reality, the only law?

He closed his eyes and felt that she was watching him, not without pain and perplexity herself. He looked at her again, met her own eyes, and saw a tear in each of them. Then this last suggestion of his desire seemed to die away with a stifled murmur, and her beauty, more and more radiant in the darkness, rose before him as a symbol of something vague which was yet more beautiful than itself.

“I may understand you to-morrow,” he said, “but I don’t understand you now.”

“And yet I took counsel with myself to-day and asked myself how I had best speak to you. On one side I might have refused to see you at all.” Longmore made a violent movement, and she added—“In that case I should have written to you. I might see you, I thought, and simply say to you that there

were excellent reasons why we should part, and that I begged this visit should be your last. This I inclined to do ; what made me decide otherwise was—simply friendship ! I said to myself that I should be glad to remember in future days, not that I had dismissed you, but that you had gone away out of the fulness of your own wisdom.”

“The fulness—the fulness !” cried Longmore.

“I am prepared, if necessary,” Madame de Mauves continued after a pause, “to fall back upon my strict right. But, as I said before, I shall be greatly disappointed if I am obliged to do that.”

“When I hear you say that,” Longmore answered, “I feel so angry, so horribly irritated, that I wonder I don’t leave you without more words.”

“If you should go away in anger, this idea of mine about our parting would be but half realised. No, I don’t want to think of you as angry ; I don’t want even to think of you as making a serious sacrifice. I want to think of you as ——”

“As a creature who never has existed—who never can exist ! A creature who knew you without loving you—who left you without regretting you !”

She turned impatiently away and walked to the

other end of the terrace. When she came back, he saw that her impatience had become a cold sternness. She stood before him again, looking at him from head to foot, in deep reproachfulness, almost in scorn. Beneath her glance he felt a kind of shame. He coloured; she observed it and withheld something she was about to say. She turned away again, walked to the other end of the terrace, and stood there looking away into the garden. It seemed to him that she had guessed he understood her, and slowly—slowly—half as the fruit of his vague self-reproach—he did understand her. She was giving him a chance to do gallantly what it seemed unworthy of both of them he should do meanly.

She liked him, she must have liked him greatly, to wish so to spare him, to go to the trouble of conceiving an ideal of conduct for him. With this sense of her friendship—her strong friendship she had just called it—Longmore's soul rose with a new flight, and suddenly felt itself breathing a clearer air. The words ceased to seem a mere bribe to his ardour; they were charged with ardour themselves; they were a present happiness. He moved rapidly towards

her with a feeling that this was something he might immediately enjoy.

They were separated by two-thirds of the length of the terrace, and he had to pass the drawing-room window. As he did so he started with an exclamation. Madame Clairin stood posted there, watching him. Conscious, apparently, that she might be suspected of eavesdropping, she stepped forward with a smile and looked from Longmore to his hostess.

“Such a *tête-à-tête* as that,” she said, “one owes no apology for interrupting. One ought to come in for good manners.”

Madame de Mauves turned round, but she answered nothing. She looked straight at Longmore, and her eyes had extraordinary eloquence. He was not exactly sure, indeed, what she meant them to say; but they seemed to say plainly something of this kind: “Call it what you will, what you have to urge upon me is the thing which this woman can best conceive. What I ask of you is something she cannot!” They seemed, somehow, to beg him to suffer her to be herself, and to intimate that that self was as little as possible like Madame Clairin. He felt an immense answering desire not to do anything which

would seem natural to this lady. He had laid his hat and stick on the parapet of the terrace. He took them up, offered his hand to Madame de Mauves with a simple good-night, bowed silently to Madame Clairin, and departed.

IX.

HE went home, and without lighting his candle flung himself on his bed. But he got no sleep till morning; he lay hour after hour tossing, thinking, wondering; his mind had never been so active. It seemed to him that Euphemia had given him in those last moments an inspiring commission, and that she had expressed herself almost as largely as if she had listened assentingly to an assurance of his love. It was neither easy nor delightful thoroughly to understand her; but little by little her perfect meaning sank into his mind and soothed it with a sense of opportunity which somehow stifled his sense of loss. For, to begin with, she meant that she could love him in no degree or contingency, in no imaginable future. This was absolute; he felt that he could alter it no more than he could pull down the constellations he lay gazing at through his open window. He wondered

what it was, in the background of her life, that she had so attached herself to. A sense of duty unquenchable to the end? A love that no outrage could stifle? "Good heavens!" he thought, "is the world so rich in the purest pearls of passion, that such tenderness as that can be wasted for ever—poured away without a sigh into bottomless darkness?" Had she, in spite of the detestable present, some precious memory which contained the germ of a shrinking hope? Was she prepared to submit to everything and yet to believe? Was it strength, was it weakness, was it a vulgar fear, was it conviction, conscience, constancy?

Longmore sank back with a sigh and an oppressive feeling that it was vain to guess at such a woman's motives. He only felt that those of Madame de Mauves were buried deep in her soul, and that they must be of the noblest, and contain nothing base. He had a dim, overwhelming sense of a sort of invulnerable constancy being the supreme law of her character—a constancy which still found a foothold among crumbling ruins. "She has loved once," he said to himself as he rose and wandered to his window; "that is for ever. Yes, yes—if she

loved again she would be *common*." He stood for a long time looking out into the starlit silence of the town and forest, and thinking of what life would have been if his constancy had met hers before this had happened. But life was this, now, and he must live. It was living keenly to stand there with such a request from such a woman still ringing in one's ears. He was not to disappoint her, he was to justify a conception which it had beguiled her weariness to shape. Longmore's imagination expanded; he threw back his head and seemed to be looking for Madame de Mauves' conception among the blinking, mocking stars. But it came to him rather on the mild night-wind, wandering in over the house-tops which covered the rest of so many heavy human hearts. What she asked, he felt that she was asking not for her own sake (she feared nothing, she needed nothing), but for that of his own happiness and his own character. He must assent to destiny. Why else was he young and strong, intelligent and resolute? He must not give it to her to reproach him with thinking that she had a moment's attention for his love—to plead, to argue, to break off in bitterness; he must see everything from above, her

indifference and his own ardour ; he must prove his strength, he must do the handsome thing ; he must decide that the handsome thing was to submit to the inevitable, to be supremely delicate, to spare her all pain, to stifle his passion, to ask no compensation, to depart without delay and try to believe that wisdom is its own reward. All this, neither more nor less, it was a matter of friendship with Madame de Mauves to expect of him. And what should he gain by it ? He should have pleased her ! . . . He flung himself on his bed again, fell asleep at last, and slept till morning.

Before noon the next day he had made up his mind that he would leave Saint-Germain at once. It seemed easier to leave without seeing her, and yet if he might ask a grain of "compensation," it would be five minutes face to face with her. He passed a restless day. Wherever he went he seemed to see her standing before him in the dusky halo of evening, and looking at him with an air of still negation more intoxicating than the most passionate self-surrender. He must certainly go, and yet it was hideously hard. He compromised and went to Paris to spend the rest of the day. He strolled along the Boulevards and

looked at the shops, sat a while in the Tuileries gardens and looked at the shabby unfortunates for whom this only was nature and summer ; but simply felt, as a result of it all, that it was a very dusty, dreary, lonely world into which Madame de Mauves was turning him away.

In a sombre mood he made his way back to the Boulevards and sat down at a table on the great plain of hot asphalt, before a café. Night came on, the lamps were lighted, the tables near him found occupants, and Paris began to wear that peculiar evening look of hers which seems to say, in the flare of windows and theatre-doors, and the muffled rumble of swift-rolling carriages, that this is no world for you unless you have your pockets lined and your scruples drugged. Longmore, however, had neither scruples nor desires ; he looked at the swarming city for the first time with an easy sense of repaying its indifference. Before long a carriage drove up to the pavement directly in front of him, and remained standing for several minutes without its occupant descending. It was one of those neat, plain coupés, drawn by a single powerful horse, in which one is apt to imagine a pale, handsome woman, buried among

silk cushions, and yawning as she sees the gas-lamps glittering in the gutters. At last the door opened and out stepped M. de Mauves. He stopped and leaned on the window for some time, talking in an excited manner to a person within. At last he gave a nod and the carriage rolled away. He stood swinging his cane and looking up and down the Boulevard, with the air of a man fumbling, as one may say, with the loose change of time. He turned towards the café and was apparently, for want of anything better worth his attention, about to seat himself at one of the tables, when he perceived Longmore. He wavered an instant, and then, without a change in his nonchalant gait, strolled towards him with a bow and a vague smile.

It was the first time they had met since their encounter in the forest after Longmore's false start for Brussels. Madame Clairin's revelations, as we may call them, had not made the Baron especially present to his mind; he had another office for his emotions than disgust. But as M. de Mauves came towards him he felt deep in his heart that he abhorred him. He noticed, however, for the first time, a shadow upon the Baron's cool placidity, and his delight at

finding that somewhere at last the shoe pinched *him*, mingled with his impulse to be as exasperatingly impenetrable as possible, enabled him to return the other's greeting with all his own self-possession.

M. de Mauves sat down, and the two men looked at each other across the table, exchanging formal greetings which did little to make their mutual scrutiny seem gracious. Longmore had no reason to suppose that the Baron knew of his sister's intimations. He was sure that M. de Mauves cared very little about his opinions, and yet he had a sense that there was that in his eyes which would have made the Baron change colour if keener suspicion had helped him to read it. M. de Mauves did not change colour, but he looked at Longmore with a half-defiant intentness which betrayed at once an irritating memory of the episode in the Bois de Boulogne, and such vigilant curiosity as was natural to a gentleman who had intrusted his "honour" to another gentleman's magnanimity—or to his artlessness.

It would appear that Longmore seemed to the Baron to possess these virtues in rather scantier measure than a few days before; for the cloud

deepened on his face, and he turned away and frowned as he lighted a cigar.

The person in the coupé, Longmore thought, whether or no the same person as the heroine of the episode of the Bois de Boulogne, was not a source of unalloyed delight. Longmore had dark blue eyes, of admirable lucidity—truth-telling eyes which had in his childhood always made his harshest taskmasters smile at his primitive fibs. An observer watching the two men, and knowing something of their relations, would certainly have said that what he saw in those eyes must not a little have puzzled and tormented M. de Mauves. They judged him, they mocked him, they eluded him, they threatened him, they triumphed over him, they treated him as no pair of eyes had ever treated him. The Baron's scheme had been to make no one happy but himself, and here was Longmore already, if looks were to be trusted, primed for an enterprise more inspiring than the finest of his own achievements. Was this candid young barbarian but a *faux bonhomme* after all? He had puzzled the Baron before, and this was once too often.

M. de Mauves hated to seem preoccupied, and he

took up the evening paper to help himself to look indifferent. As he glanced over it he uttered some cold common-place on the political situation, which gave Longmore a fair opportunity of replying by an ironical sally which made him seem for the moment aggressively at his ease. And yet our hero was far from being master of the situation. The Baron's ill-humour did him good, so far as it pointed to a want of harmony with the lady in the coupé ; but it disturbed him sorely as he began to suspect that it possibly meant jealousy of himself. It passed through his mind that jealousy is a passion with a double face, and that in some of its moods it bears a plausible likeness to affection. It recurred to him painfully that the Baron might grow ashamed of his political compact with his wife, and he felt that it would be far more tolerable in the future to think of his continued turpitude than of his repentance. The two men sat for half an hour exchanging stinted small-talk, the Baron feeling a nervous need of playing the spy, and Longmore indulging a ferocious relish of his discomfort. These thin amenities were interrupted however by the arrival of a friend of M. de Mauves—a tall, pale

consumptive-looking dandy, who filled the air with the odour of heliotrope. He looked up and down the Boulevard wearily, examined the Baron's toilet from head to foot, then surveyed his own in the same fashion, and at last announced languidly that the Duchess was in town! M. de Mauves must come with him to call; she had abused him dreadfully a couple of evenings before—a sure sign she wanted to see him.

“I depend upon you,” said M. de Mauves' friend with an infantine drawl, “to put her *en train*.”

M. de Mauves resisted, and protested that he was *d'une humeur massacrate*; but at last he allowed himself to be drawn to his feet, and stood looking awkwardly—awkwardly for M. de Mauves—at Longmore. “You will excuse me,” he said dryly; “you, too, probably have occupation for the evening?”

“None but to catch my train,” Longmore answered, looking at his watch.

“Ah, you go back to Saint-Germain?”

“In half an hour.”

M. de Mauves seemed on the point of disengaging himself from his companion's arm, which was locked in his own; but on the latter uttering

some persuasive murmur, he lifted his hat stiffly and turned away.

Longmore the next day wandered off to the terrace, to try and beguile the restlessness with which he waited for evening; for he wished to see Madame de Mauves for the last time at the hour of long shadows and pale, pink, reflected lights, as he had almost always seen her. Destiny, however, took no account of this humble plea for poetic justice; it was his fortune to meet her on the terrace sitting under a tree, alone. It was an hour when the place was almost empty; the day was warm, but as he took his place beside her a light breeze stirred the leafy edges of the broad circle of shadow in which she sat. She looked at him with candid anxiety, and he immediately told her that he should leave Saint-Germain that evening—that he must bid her farewell. Her eye expanded and brightened for a moment as he spoke; but she said nothing and turned her glance away towards distant Paris, as it lay twinkling and flashing through its hot exhalations. “I have a request to make of you,” he added; “that you think of me as a man who has felt much and claimed little.”

She drew a long breath which almost suggested pain. "I can't think of you as unhappy. That is impossible. You have a life to lead, you have duties, talents, and interests. I shall hear of your career. And then," she continued after a pause and with the deepest seriousness, "one can't be unhappy through having a better opinion of a friend, instead of a worse."

For a moment he failed to understand her. "Do you mean that there can be varying degrees in my opinion of you?"

She rose and pushed away her chair. "I mean," she said quickly, "that it's better to have done nothing in bitterness—nothing in passion." And she began to walk.

Longmore followed her, without answering. But he took off his hat and with his pocket-handkerchief wiped his forehead. "Where shall you go? what shall you do?" he asked at last, abruptly.

"Do? I shall do as I have always done—except perhaps that I shall go for a while to Auvergne."

"I shall go to America. I have done with Europe for the present."

She glanced at him as he walked beside her after

he had spoken these words, and then bent her eyes for a long time on the ground. At last, seeing that she was going far, she stopped and put out her hand. "Good-by," she said; "may you have all the happiness you deserve!"

He took her hand and looked at her, but something was passing in him that made it impossible to return her hand's light pressure. Something of infinite value was floating past him, and he had taken an oath not to raise a finger to stop it. It was borne by the strong current of the world's great life and not of his own small one. Madame de Mauves disengaged her hand, gathered her shawl, and smiled at him almost as you would do at a child you should wish to encourage. Several moments later he was still standing watching her receding figure. When it had disappeared, he shook himself, walked rapidly back to his hotel, and without waiting for the evening train paid his bill and departed.

Later in the day M. de Mauves came into his wife's drawing-room, where she sat waiting to be summoned to dinner. He was dressed with a scrupulous freshness which seemed to indicate an intention of dining out. He walked up and down for some moments in

silence, then rang the bell for a servant, and went out into the hall to meet him. He ordered the carriage to take him to the station, paused a moment with his hand on the knob of the door, dismissed the servant angrily as the latter lingered observing him, re-entered the drawing-room, resumed his restless walk, and at last stopped abruptly before his wife, who had taken up a book. "May I ask the favour," he said with evident effort, in spite of a forced smile of easy courtesy, "of having a question answered?"

"It's a favour I never refused," Madame de Mauves replied.

"Very true. Do you expect this evening a visit from Mr. Longmore?"

"Mr. Longmore," said his wife, "has left Saint-Germain." M. de Mauves started and his smile expired. "Mr. Longmore," his wife continued, "has gone to America."

M. de Mauves stared a moment, flushed deeply, and turned away. Then recovering himself—"Had anything happened?" he asked. "Had he a sudden call?"

But his question received no answer. At the same moment the servant threw open the door and

announced dinner ; Madame Clairin rustled in, rubbing her white hands, Madame de Mauves passed silently into the dining-room, and he stood frowning and wondering. Before long he went out upon the terrace and continued his uneasy walk. At the end of a quarter of an hour the servant came to inform him that the carriage was at the door. "Send it away," he said curtly. "I shall not use it." When the ladies had half finished dinner he went in and joined them, with a formal apology to his wife for his tardiness.

The dishes were brought back, but he hardly tasted them ; on the other hand, he drank a great deal of wine. There was little talk ; what there was, was supplied by Madame Clairin. Twice she saw her brother's eyes fixed on her own, over his wineglass, with a piercing, questioning glance. She replied by an elevation of the eyebrows which did the office of a shrug of the shoulders. M. de Mauves was left alone to finish his wine ; he sat over it for more than an hour, and let the darkness gather about him. At last the servant came in with a letter and lighted a candle. The letter was a telegram, which M. de Mauves, when he had read it, burnt at the candle. After five

minutes' meditation, he wrote a message on the back of a visiting-card and gave it to the servant to carry to the office. The man knew quite as much as his master suspected about the lady to whom the telegram was addressed ; but its contents puzzled him ; they consisted of the single word, "*Impossible.*" As the evening passed without her brother reappearing in the drawing-room, Madame Clairin came to him where he sat by his solitary candle. He took no notice of her presence for some time ; but he was the one person to whom she allowed this licence. At last, speaking in a peremptory tone, "The American has gone home at an hour's notice," he said. "What does it mean?"

Madame Clairin now gave free play to the shrug she had been obliged to suppress at the table. "It means that I have a sister-in-law whom I have not the honour to understand."

He said nothing more, and silently allowed her to depart, as if it had been her duty to provide him with an explanation, and he was disgusted with her levity. When she had gone, he went into the garden and walked up and down, smoking. He saw his wife sitting alone on the terrace, but remained below

strolling along the narrow paths. He remained a long time. It became late, and Madame de Mauves disappeared. Towards midnight he dropped upon a bench, tired, with a kind of angry sigh. It was sinking into his mind that he, too, did not understand Madame Clairin's sister-in-law.

Longmore was obliged to wait a week in London for a ship. It was very hot, and he went out one day to Richmond. In the garden of the hotel at which he dined he met his friend Mrs. Draper, who was staying there. She made eager inquiry about Madame de Mauves; but Longmore at first, as they sat looking out at the famous view of the Thames, parried her questions and confined himself to small-talk. At last she said she was afraid he had something to conceal; whereupon, after a pause, he asked her if she remembered recommending him, in the letter she sent to him at Saint-Germain, to draw the sadness from her friend's smile. "The last I saw of her was her smile," said he—"when I bade her good-by."

"I remember urging you to 'console' her," Mrs. Draper answered, "and I wondered afterwards whether—a model of discretion as you are—I had not given you rather foolish advice."

“She has her consolation in herself,” he said; “she needs none that any one else can offer her. That’s for troubles for which—be it more, be it less—our own folly has to answer. Madame de Mauves has not a grain of folly left.”

“Ah, don’t say that!” murmured Mrs. Draper. “Just a little folly is very graceful.”

Longmore rose to go, with a quick, nervous movement. “Don’t talk of grace,” he said, “till you have measured her reason!”

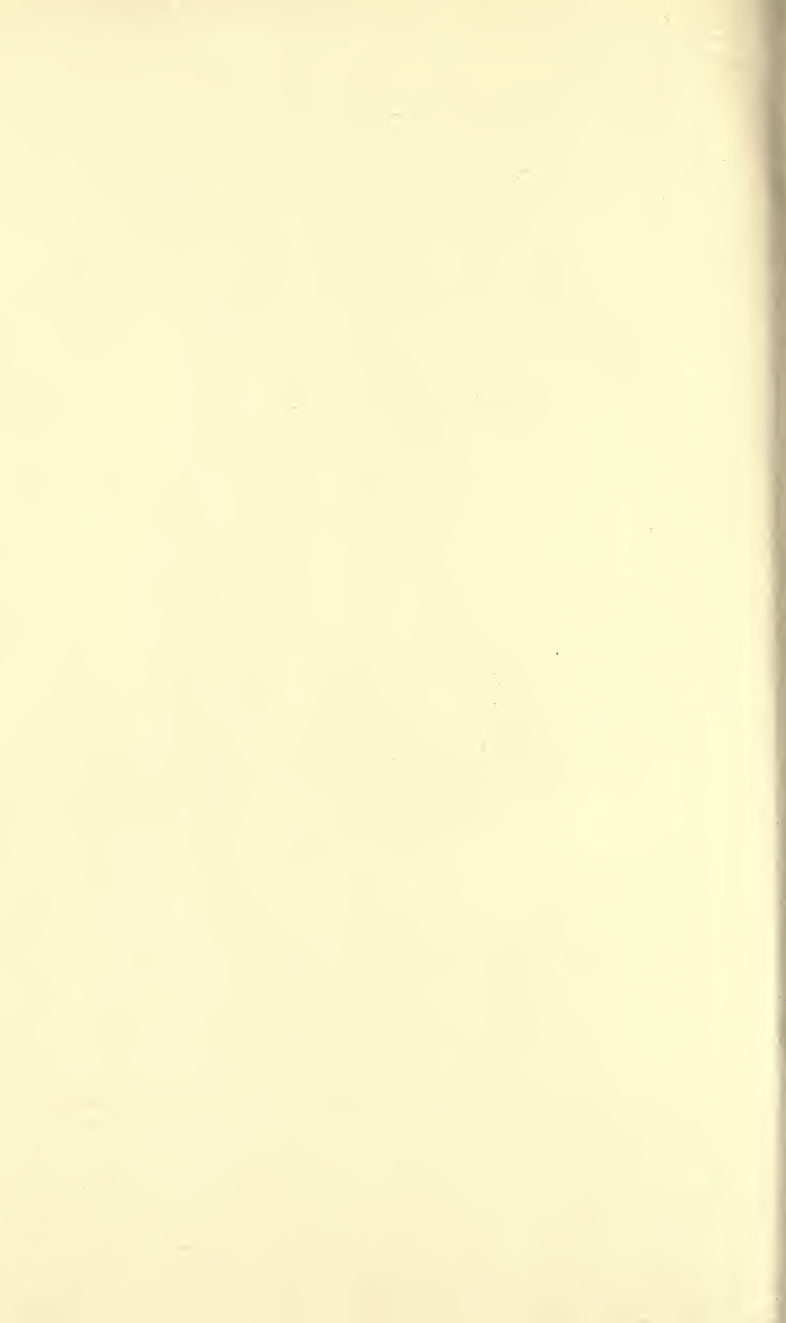
For two years after his return to America he heard nothing of Madame de Mauves. That he thought of her intently, constantly, I need hardly say; most people wondered why such a clever young man should not “devote” himself to something; but to himself he seemed absorbingly occupied. He never wrote to her; he believed that she preferred it. At last he heard that Mrs. Draper had come home, and he immediately called on her. “Of course,” she said after the first greetings, “you are dying for news of Madame de Mauves. Prepare yourself for something strange. I heard from her two or three times during the year after your return. She left Saint-Germain and went to live in the country, on some old

property of her husband's. She wrote me very kind little notes, but I felt somehow that—in spite of what you said about 'consolation'—they were the notes of a very sad woman. The only advice I could have given her was to leave her wretch of a husband and come back to her own land and her own people. But this I didn't feel free to do, and yet it made me so miserable not to be able to help her that I preferred to let our correspondence die a natural death. I had no news of her for a year. Last summer, however, I met at Vichy a clever young Frenchman whom I accidentally learned to be a friend of Euphemia's charming sister-in-law, Madame Clairin. I lost no time in asking him what he knew about Madame de Mauves—a countrywoman of mine and an old friend. 'I congratulate you on possessing her friendship,' he answered. 'That's the charming little woman who killed her husband.' You may imagine that I promptly asked for an explanation, and he proceeded to relate to me what he called the whole story. M. de Mauves had *fait quelques folies*, which his wife had taken absurdly to heart. He had repented and asked her forgiveness, which she had inexorably refused. She was very pretty, and severity,

apparently, suited her style ; for whether or no her husband had been in love with her before, he fell madly in love with her now. He was the proudest man in France, but he had begged her on his knees to be re-admitted to favour. All in vain ! She was stone, she was ice, she was outraged virtue. People noticed a great change in him ; he gave up society, ceased to care for anything, looked shockingly. One fine day they learned that he had blown out his brains. My friend had the story, of course, from Madame Clairin."

Longmore was strongly moved, and his first impulse after he had recovered his composure was to return immediately to Europe. But several years have passed, and he still lingers at home. The truth is, that in the midst of all the ardent tenderness of his memory of Madame de Mauves, he has become conscious of a singular feeling—a feeling for which awe would be hardly too strong a name.





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